FIGHT RACISM!
FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group | Number 143 June/July 1998 | (unwaged 30p) 50p

INDONESIA in revolt

Inside:

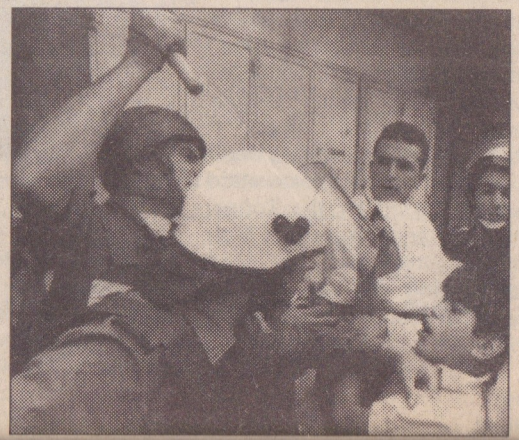
Solidarity price £1

EDITORIAL:
Labour's first year p2

RACISM:
Stephen Lawrence Inquiry p3

VIEW FROM INSIDE:
South Africa and Zimbabwe p5

ISRAEL:



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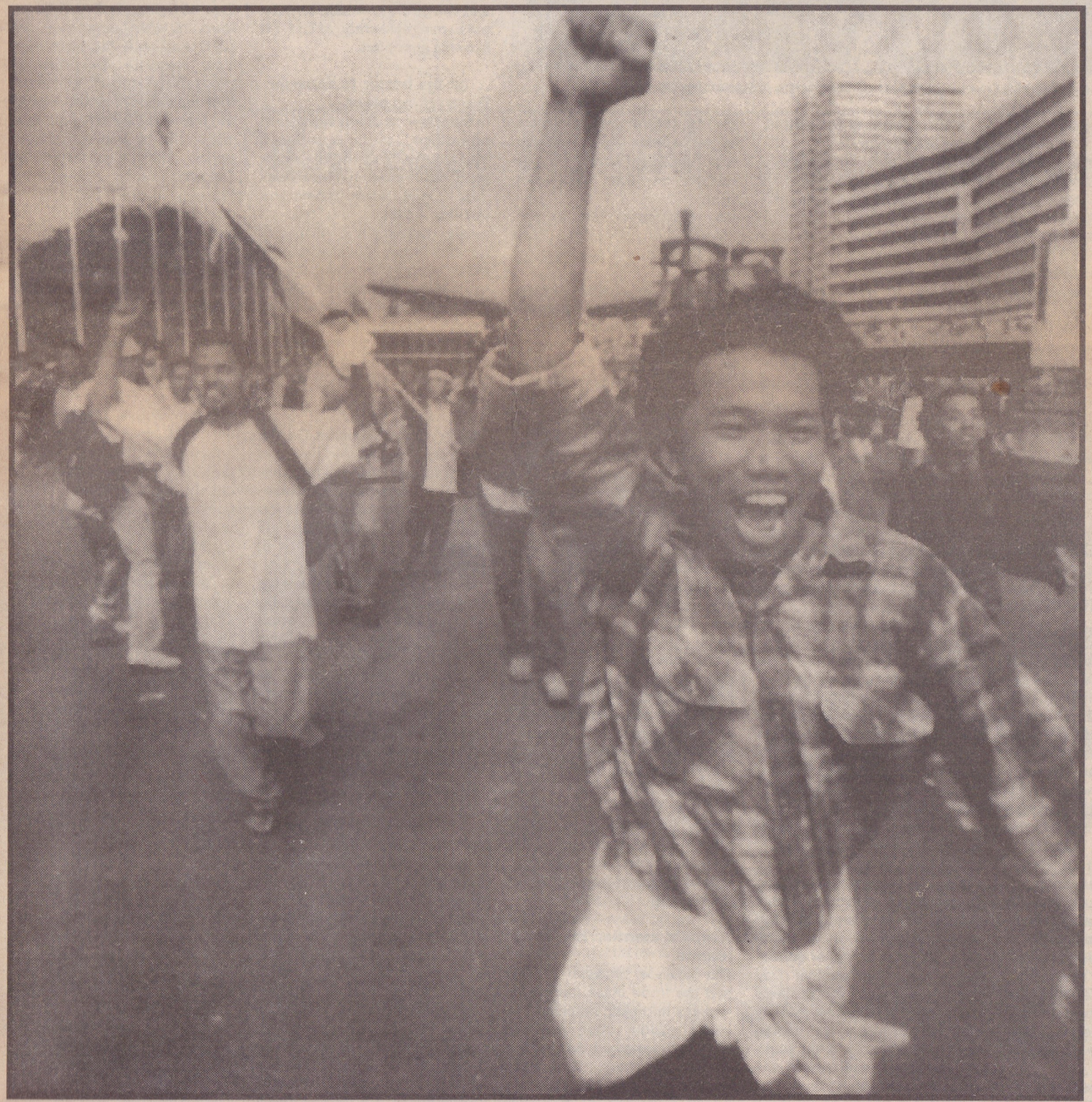

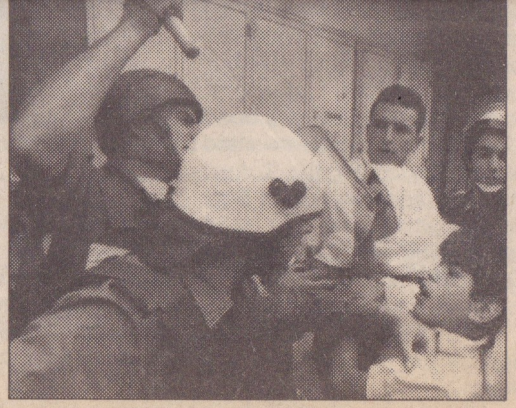

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Labour's first year

Labour won the 1997 general election because it was the preferred party of the ruling class. Now we can see why. For the last 12 months, it has pursued ruling class interests with complete single-mindedness. Whether it has been the City of London, the arms manufacturers or News International, Labour has ensured that they have prospered. It has of course been a very different story for the working class. Labour has continued to ensure that the poor pay.

Not that it promised anything else. Labour had made clear it would defend ruling class interests – in particular in relation to Europe, over which the Tories were hopelessly split. By the time of the election, the ruling class was quite satisfied that Labour would defend its political and economic interests in conditions of increasing international instability. It was also confident that when Labour spoke of welfare reform, it would continue, and indeed accelerate, the attack on state welfare started by the Tories. *The Sun*'s endorsement of Blair showed which way the wind was blowing, and with most of the left also supporting Labour, how could it fail to win?

Fighting for the ruling class...

Labour's historical enthusiasm for the arms industry in October 1995, when he said that Labour 'believe, unlike the [Tory] government, that the British defence industry is a strategic part not only of our defence effort but of our manufacturing capability. We will work with the defence industry to identify technologies in which we lead the world and to ensure that they realise their potential' (quoted in John Pilger's *Hidden Agendas*). Hence Labour's current defence review has explicitly excluded both Trident and the Eurofighter from the axe; the latter is a crucial project if British calls the 'waywardness' of British Labour MEPs who have opposed such a move;

• Cook's support for the extension of the NATO military alliance to include Eastern Europe.

Some things never change; one is that Labour has always been an imperialist party and ever will be, 'ethical' foreign policy or not.

Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor Brown – Labour has made sure that the ruling class has prospered

...while greasing the palms of the middle class

Winning the election depended on Labour persuading the middle class that its privileged conditions were safe in Labour's hands. In this it was entirely successful: social class C1 (professional Office and London Underground;

• by increasing share ownership. Currently some 16 million people hold shares – far more than under the Tories; the rising stock market has given those who invested the proceeds of demutualisation even more money;

• through rising house prices, which have benefited many of the 16 million house-owners, but especially those who had negative equity, and the 5 million who own their houses outright;

• by retaining existing tax concessions on pensions, PEPs and TESSAs, worth £10bn per all. 58% of those in employment for more than 20 years with the same employer are unionised compared to only 12% of those in employment for less than a year. With only 38% of jobs created in the last 4 years being permanent, the trend towards a smaller but ever more privileged trade union membership will continue.

For its part, the trade union leadership has destroyed such struggles that have taken place – those of the Liverpool dockers and the Hillingdon workers are two obvious cases. It has no intention of challenging anti-trade union legislation, even though Blair has boasted that it is the most restrictive in the western world. Now that Labour has made some minor concessions over the *Fairness at Work* White Paper, the TUC will deliver the support that is necessary to maintain social peace, and will go on to ensure that the pitiful minimum wage of £3.60 is likewise accepted.

...all the better to hammer the working class

In the absence of any significant opposition, Labour has had a free hand in attacking the working class, through the New Deal, cuts in lone parent benefit and income support, and mooted cuts in disability and incapacity benefits. It has recruited middle are so important: they could have a catastrophic impact on international banking capital, particularly if they spread elsewhere, say to South Korea or Japan. And there is a further lesson which will not be lost on the oppressed: that working class action can lead to the destruction of even the most oppressive and brutal regimes, and in the end imperialism can do nothing about it. ■

NHS: Labour's lists and lies

HANNAH CALLER

One of Labour's five General Election pledges was to cut NHS waiting lists by 100,000. This would be funded through the cuts in 'red tape' that would follow the end of the internal NHS market. Precisely the opposite has happened: they have risen by 150,000, and by 40,000 since January alone. The cause is not difficult to find: the squeeze on NHS spending that followed Labour's accep-

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Not that it promised anything else. Labour had made clear it would defend ruling class interests – in particular in relation to Europe, over which the Tories were hopelessly split. By the time of the election, the ruling class was quite satisfied that Labour would defend its political and economic interests in conditions of increasing international instability. It was also confident that when Labour spoke of welfare reform, it would continue, and indeed accelerate, the attack on state welfare started by the Tories. *The Sun*'s endorsement of Blair showed which way the wind was blowing, and with most of the left also supporting Labour, how could it fail to win?

Fighting for the ruling class...

Over the last 12 months Labour has completely vindicated ruling class confidence. Within days of the election, it effectively handed government control over the Bank of England back to the City of London. The result has been a succession of bank rate increases which have pushed the pound to its strongest position for many years. Meanwhile the stock market has boomed: the FTSE has continued a seemingly remorseless climb from around 5,000 to the 6,000 level. Links between the government and multinationals now exist at every level: Lord Simon, head of BP, has a ministerial post in the DTI; he is also a director of RTZ. Martin Taylor, head of Barclay's Bank, is on the committee reviewing tax and benefit policies, whilst PolyGram's Stuart Till is leading an advisory committee on the British film industry.

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Cook's 'ethical' foreign policy has proved baloney from the outset. Labour has approved the export of 56 batches of arms to Indonesia, and refused only seven. It has sanctioned the current delivery of Hawk aircraft despite acknowledging in opposition that they were being used in East Timor; other weaponry includes 200,000 submachineguns. In a visit to Indonesia last year, Cook gave Suharto his political support – not enough to prevent him being toppled some six months later.

The recent debacle in Sierra Leone is another example of this 'ethical' nonsense. Mercenary outfits like Sandline, with their links to military intelligence, are now a crucial component of British foreign policy.

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This change has proved an economic necessity for the ruling class as payment for state welfare is a deduction from their profits, and one which provides some benefit, however small, to the working class, through a partial redistribution of wealth

invested the proceeds of demutualisation even more money;

- through rising house prices, which have benefited many of the 16 million house-owners, but especially those who had negative equity, and the 5 million who own their houses outright;
- by retaining existing tax concessions on pensions, PEPs and TESSAs, worth £10bn per annum;
- through education breaks. The 163 remaining grammar schools are safe in Labour's hands whilst, although there is to be no selection on 'ability', there is selection on 'aptitude', and it must be a test of one or the other to distinguish between the two.

Falling unemployment and rising real wages have also helped the middle class disproportionately. Of course the withdrawal of state welfare means they have to make some private provision for their healthcare or pensions. But the point is that they can afford it, and the working class cannot. And whilst some sections are facing a more uncertain future, there is still a world of difference between life on a wage of £20,000 per annum and existence on £3 or £4 per hour or less. Privilege is not just an absolute, it is also

smaller but ever more privileged trade union membership will continue.

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class action can lead to the destruction of even the most oppressive and brutal regimes, and in the end imperialism can do nothing about it. ■

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On the eve of the recent publication of the latest waiting list figures, showing them to be just short of 1.3 million, Tony Blair said 'we have made the pledge; once we have sorted out public finances, once we have got the extra investment into the NHS, we will meet our pledge'. So...waiting lists may be cut, they may not be; they may be cut during the lifetime of this government. There again, they might not. Given the rate of increase, the new target to cut them by 167,000 by next March is impossible, particularly as according to Stephen Thornton, Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation, it would involve 'using [operating] theatres on evenings and weekends and persuading doctors and nurses and technicians to work extra hours, and finding enough hospital beds and community nurses to care for people at

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Being a millionaire allows preferential access to Number 10. Bernie Ecclestone only had to make one appearance (and lob £1m into Labour Party coffers) to get an indefinite suspension of moves to ban tobacco sponsorship of motor racing. Rupert Murdoch has meetings every six months with Tony Blair, the most recent in early May. Meanwhile, as a favour to Murdoch, the cabinet will defeat attempts to amend the current Media Competition Bill banning predatory pricing. Meanwhile, Brown's boast that Britain now has 'the lowest main rate of corporation tax of any major industrialised country' confirms where Labour's priorities lie.

...and its imperialist interests

David Clark, as shadow spokesperson on defence, spelled out *Agendas*). Hence Labour's current defence review has explicitly excluded both Trident and the Eurofighter from the axe; the latter is a crucial project if British imperialism is to maintain its position as the world's second largest exporter of arms.

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The recent debacle in Sierra Leone is another example of this 'ethical' nonsense. Mercenary outfits like Sandline, with their links to military intelligence, are now a crucial component of British foreign policy. Sandline's role was primarily one of co-ordinating the Nigerian invasion which restored Kabbah to power. That the Abacha regime in Nigeria is supposedly subject to British Commonwealth sanctions of course makes the use of such unofficial and deniable means of interference essential. What was at issue was Britain's diamond interests – apart from being president, Kabbah also holds the largest diamond concession in Sierra Leone. Other examples of Cook's 'ethical' foreign policy are:

- Labour's military alliance with the US against Iraq, which almost led to another slaughter, and which still means that tens of thousands of children are dying because of sanctions;
- Its enthusiasm for including fascist Turkey within the EU; Cook has condemned what he

on Labour persuading the middle class that its privileged conditions were safe in Labour's hands. In this it was entirely successful: social class C1 (professionals) voted 47% for Labour compared to 28% in 1992, whilst C2 (supervisors and lower managers) support rose from 40% to 54%. Labour got a greater share of the homeowner vote (41%) than the Tories (35%). And for the moment at least, Labour has delivered. It has not raised the basic tax levels, nor increased national insurance rates, two of its key election promises. Instead it has continued the trend started under the Tories where privilege is increasingly distributed to the middle class through the market rather than through state welfare.

This change has proved an economic necessity for the ruling class as payment for state welfare is a deduction from their profits, and one which provides some benefit, however small, to the working class, through a partial redistribution of wealth from the middle class via the taxation system. The ruling class has to cut this working class 'social wage' as much as it has to cut their money wages, but at the same time it has to ensure the middle class retains its privileged position. If this cannot be achieved through state handouts such as mortgage tax relief or higher education grants, then another way has to be found, for privilege there has to be: political stability depends on a satisfied middle class. But to exclude the working class from any benefit, the market mechanism has to be used, and there are no shortage of ways:

- through the perks of privatisation. The middle class got £35 billion from the frenzy of building society demutualisation last year; meanwhile Labour is planning partial sell-offs of the Post

right;

- by retaining existing tax concessions on pensions, PEPs and TESSAs, worth £10bn per annum;
- through education breaks. The 163 remaining grammar schools are safe in Labour's hands whilst, although there is to be no selection on 'ability', there is selection on 'aptitude', and it must be a test of one or the other to distinguish between the two.

Falling unemployment and rising real wages have also helped the middle class disproportionately. Of course the withdrawal of state welfare means they have to make some private provision for their healthcare or pensions. But the point is that they can afford it, and the working class cannot. And whilst some sections are facing a more uncertain future, there is still a world of difference between life on a wage of £20,000 per annum and existence on £3 or £4 per hour or less. Privilege is not just an absolute, it is also relative. One in three Labour members earn over £30,000, half over £20,000. Life may be harder for some of the more affluent, even more risky. Yet this cannot compare to the conditions of those forced to live on poverty pay.

...not to mention the trade unions

The alliance between Labour and the trade union leadership remains unbroken precisely because middle class privilege has been sustained. As we have noted elsewhere, the trade unions are 'increasingly composed of the professional, better-educated 'middle class' workers in relatively stable employment'; 38% of those with degrees, 47% of those with other higher education qualifications are in unions compared to 26% with no qualifications at

cuts in lone parent benefit and income support, and mooted cuts in disability and incapacity benefits. It has recruited middle class support for this process by making all sorts of allegations on the extent of welfare fraud – none of them backed by any study – and by stigmatising those on benefits as irresponsible and work-shy. It blames truancy and teenage crime on feckless parents – all of them working class, of course. On this basis it is constructing a regime characterised by authoritarianism, intolerance and vindictiveness. Economic deregulation of the sort that Labour applauds is bringing the disintegration of working class life – but according to Labour it is the working class which is to blame, not 'flexible' labour markets which depend on poverty pay and slave conditions. Hence Labour is introducing and extending all sorts of measures to regiment and discipline workers, through the JSA, the New Deal, the formation of the Social Exclusion Unit. The consequence of Labour policies is that the number of those in poverty will rise by a further two million during the lifetime of the government.

Labour has to hold together the coalition which elected it to office whilst it implements the measures necessary to discipline and control the most impoverished sections of the working class. Whether it will be able to do so for any length of time depends on the pace at which the underlying economic crisis develops. A collapse in the stock markets will spell the end of the market-distributed privileges of the middle class, and the political stability they bring. Already sections – teachers, health workers and college lecturers – are under increasing pressure. This is the start of a process of proletarianisation. This is why events in Indonesia

January alone. The cause is not difficult to find: the squeeze on NHS spending that followed Labour's acceptance of Tory spending plans.** On the eve of the recent publication of the latest waiting list figures, showing them to be just short of 1.3 million, Tony Blair said 'we have made the pledge; once we have sorted out public finances, once we have got the extra investment into the NHS, we will meet our pledge'. So...waiting lists may be cut, they may not be; they may be cut during the lifetime of this government. There again, they might not. Given the rate of increase, the new target to cut them by 167,000 by next March is impossible, particularly as according to Stephen Thornton, Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation, it would involve 'using [operating] theatres on evenings and weekends and persuading doctors and nurses and technicians to work extra hours, and finding enough hospital beds and community nurses to care for people at home after an operation'. In short, it means making staff work harder and longer than they already do.

The focus on waiting lists is, anyway, dishonest. What matters, after all, is not how many people are waiting for an operation, but how long they have to wait after a GP referral, and this also is increasing. Furthermore, it diverts attention from other equally important services, such as mental health, which are in even deeper crisis. The fact is that under this Labour government, the annual increase in NHS spending will be lower than under the Tories, and insufficient to cover the increasing costs of medical advance. In short, cuts will continue, and if money is diverted into cutting waiting lists, it will mean reduced services in other areas.

Brutality at Wormwood Scrubs

On 5 May at Southend Crown Court the Prison Service headed off a civil action by agreeing to pay ex-prisoner Andrzy Jakubczyk £7,000 compensation for the brutality he suffered at Wormwood Scrubs in 1993. In the light of recent revelations of systematic beatings and harassment of prisoners by the Scrubs staff, the Prison Service was clearly keen to avoid a hearing which would further expose malpractice at that prison. ANDRZY JAKUBCZYK is a long time FRFI reader and has sent us this account of his treatment.

On 22 March 1993 I was transferred to Wormwood Scrubs prison on the instructions of John Golds of the Special Unit Selection Committee, having declined to remain at the Woodhill Special Unit. Throughout the 14 days I remained at Wormwood Scrubs I refused to communicate with any prison officials, refusing to respond to questions, demands and abuse. Given my constant inter-segregation unit transfers around the prison estate every 28 days that attitude was understandable. Despite the fact that a 1991 government White Paper 'Custody, Care and Justice' had prohibited the practice of frequent transfers (known as 'the circuit'), the Prison Service continued them. The White Paper noted that such a practice was likely to exacerbate disruptive behaviour and increase feelings of victimisation

Stephen Lawrence inquiry

Police racism exposed

CAT WIENER

'My son was stereotyped by the police: he was black, then he must be a criminal... [his] crime was that he was walking down the road looking for a bus to take him home. Our crime is living in a country where the justice system supports racist murders against innocent people.' (Doreen Lawrence)

In March, at the start of the public inquiry into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence, Mike Mansfield QC described the original investigation as so flawed that one had to conclude 'deeper causes and forces had been at work'. What has emerged so far is a picture of police incompetence so gross that it can only have been the result of racism.

The inquiry heard how, as Stephen lay dead or dying in a pool of blood, the first officers on the scene made no attempt at resuscitation, not even bothering to get first aid kits out of the car. In three hours at the scene, a senior officer, Inspector Steven Groves, did not bother to find out Stephen's injuries or his condition. His only interest in Duwayne Brooks, who had been with Stephen when he was stabbed and was in a state of great distress, was as a possible suspect. Ian McDonald, Duwayne's QC, inquired: 'So you arrive at the scene of a crime. There is one black man lying on the floor and one other black man standing close by. Everyone else is white. Of all the people there, he is the one person who

Ex-Detective Superintendent Weeden – 'ignorance of the law'

attacker, and the direction they ran off in. Groves also failed to order an immediate house-to-house search or follow up a lead about a carload of jeering white youths who had twice driven past the scene (and included two men connected with the racist murder of another young black man, Rolan Adams, in 1991).

Over the next two days, nine different sources, including two police informants, named five white suspects. Neil and Jamie Acourt, Gary Dobson, Luke Knight and David Norris were a local gang of well-known racists, with a record of violence. Four had been seen that night washing blood off themselves. A house search turned up the diary of a friend of theirs, who had written: 'Acourts stabbed a black boy up Well Hall Road. Jamie and Neil, Gary, David, Lukie.' Detective Inspector Philip Jeynes has admitted that enough evidence existed to arrest the men within 48 hours. Yet no arrests were made for two

on what he considered insufficient evidence. Another senior officer, Detective Superintendent Ian Crampton, claims that information about potential witnesses never reached him. In reality, all evidence was deliberately ignored or suppressed. Eyewitness Roy Westbrook attended a identity parade but left after being kept waiting for *nine hours*; another witness refused to attend further parades after an inspector called out his name in front of suspects.

Police mounted a 'surveillance operation' to gather their own evidence. And what a farce that turned out to be. There was no mobile phone and the surveillance team failed to record the removal of bags potentially containing evidence (such as bloodstained clothes) from the suspects' homes.

At the same time, police consistently treated Stephen's family and friends with contempt. At the hospital, Inspector Ian Little told Stephen's parents:

cers kept the family in the dark about the investigation and repeatedly interrogated them, implying that Stephen had been involved in a gang and in criminal activity. When no arrests were made, the family presented a list of suspects to Detective Chief Superintendent William Isley. He screwed the piece of paper into a ball before their eyes. Duwayne Brooks was asked what he and Stephen had done to provoke the attack and if they'd been harassing white girls in the local McDonald's. He told the inquiry, 'I'm sad, confused and pissed about this system where racists attack and go free but innocent victims like Steve and I are treated like criminals.'

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Condon has criticised the inquiry as 'unfair' to his officers and as 'putting relations between police and the black community at risk'! The police are bending over backwards to appear simply incompetent idiots – far better that than for the truth to emerge that they are lying, corrupt racists.

Five years on, Stephen's murderers still walk the streets. They have now been subpoenaed to appear before the public inquiry. But even if they finally answer questions, the inquiry cannot bring justice. Neil Acourt, Dobson and Knight, having been acquitted in 1996, cannot be tried again. All the senior officers are now retired or about to be. All that the inquiry can do is ensure that police racism is exposed. ■

The campaign is asking people to attend the public inquiry on the 4th floor of Hamilton House, Shopping Centre, Elephant and Castle, London SE1 every day. Briefings are held at 1pm daily. The

What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit – that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

▶ In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people – women in particular – trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25%of the population – the majority women and children – lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. ***The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.***

▶ Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. ***The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.***

▶ While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. ***The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights – the right to organise and protest.***

▶ Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties are subject to military occupation and brutal repression. ***The RCG supports the struggle of***

agreeing to pay ex-prisoner Andrzy Jakubczyk £7,000 compensation for the brutality he suffered at Wormwood Scrubs in 1993. In the light of recent revelations of systematic beatings and harassment of prisoners by the Scrubs staff, the Prison Service was clearly keen to avoid a hearing which would further expose malpractice at that prison. ANDRZY JAKUBCZYK **is a long time FRFI reader and has sent us this account of his treatment.**

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It was against this background that the assault at Wormwood Scrubs occurred. On 25 March 1993 I was seriously and savagely assaulted by a group of prison officers in the segregation unit; my 'attitude' had antagonised them. In an attempt to justify their violence, prison officials falsely alleged that I had assaulted a prison officer and that the subsequent restraint and consequent injuries were the result of a lawful use of force. However, official records disclosed to my solicitor revealed not only that the charge of assault against me was

Ex-Detective Superintendent Weeden – 'ignorance of the law'

he must be a criminal... [his] crime was that he was walking down the road looking for a bus to take him home. Our crime is living in a country where the justice system supports racist murders against innocent people.' (Doreen Lawrence)

In March, at the start of the public inquiry into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence, Mike Mansfield QC described the original investigation as so flawed that one had to conclude 'deeper causes and forces had been at work'. What has emerged so far is a picture of police incompetence so gross that it can only have been the result of racism.

The inquiry heard how, as Stephen lay dead or dying in a pool of blood, the first officers on the scene made no attempt at resuscitation, not even bothering to get first aid kits out of the car. In three hours at the scene, a senior officer, Inspector Steven Groves, did not bother to find out Stephen's injuries or his condition. His only interest in Duwayne Brooks, who had been with Stephen when he was stabbed and was in a state of great distress, was as a possible suspect. Ian McDonald, Duwayne's QC, inquired: 'So you arrive at the scene of a crime. There is one black man lying on the floor and one other black man standing close by. Everyone else is white. Of all the people there, he is the one person who you think might be a suspect?' Groves agreed. Groves also 'failed to discover' that Duwayne had already given police officers a description of one attacker, and the direction they ran off in. Groves also failed to order an immediate house-to-house search or follow up a lead about a carload of jeering white youths who had twice driven past the scene (and included two men connected with the racist murder of another young black man, Rolan Adams, in 1991).

Over the next two days, nine different sources, including two police informants, named five white suspects. Neil and Jamie Acourt, Gary Dobson, Luke Knight and David Norris were a local gang of well-known racists, with a record of violence. Four had been seen that night washing blood off themselves. A house search turned up the diary of a friend of theirs, who had written: 'Acourts stabbed a black boy up Well Hall Road. Jamie and Neil, Gary, David, Lukie.' Detective Inspector Philip Jeynes has admitted that enough evidence existed to arrest the men within 48 hours. Yet no arrests were made for two weeks. Former Detective Superintendent Brian Weeden, who led the investigation, claims that 'ignorance of the law' prevented him from making arrests on what he considered insufficient evidence. Another senior officer, Detective Superintendent Ian Crampton, claims that information about potential witnesses never reached him. In reality, all evidence was deliberately ignored or suppressed. Eyewitness Roy Westbrook attended a identity parade but left after being kept waiting for *nine hours*; another witness refused to attend further parades after an inspector called out his name in front of suspects.

Police mounted a 'surveillance operation' to gather their own evidence. And what a farce that turned out to be. There was no mobile phone and the surveillance team failed to record the removal of bags potentially containing evidence (such as bloodstained clothes) from the suspects' homes.

At the same time, police consistently treated Stephen's family and friends with contempt. At the hospital, Inspector Ian Little told Stephen's parents: 'We've got a young lad in there, he's dead. We don't who he is and we'd like you to clarify that point.' He offered no sympathy or support. Police 'liaison' officer Chief Superintendent William Isley. He screwed the piece of paper into a ball before their eyes. Duwayne Brooks was asked what he and Stephen had done to provoke the attack and if they'd been harassing white girls in the local McDonald's. He told the inquiry, 'I'm sad, confused and pissed about this system where racists attack and go free but innocent victims like Steve and I are treated like criminals.'

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Condon has criticised the inquiry as 'unfair' to his officers and as 'putting relations between police and the black community at risk'! The police are bending over backwards to appear simply incompetent idiots – far better that than for the truth to emerge that they are lying, corrupt racists.

Five years on, Stephen's murderers still walk the streets. They have now been subpoenaed to appear before the public inquiry. But even if they finally answer questions, the inquiry cannot bring justice. Neil Acourt, Dobson and Knight, having been acquitted in 1996, cannot be tried again. All the senior officers are now retired or about to be. All that the inquiry can do is ensure that police racism is exposed. ■

The campaign is asking people to attend the public inquiry on the 4th floor of Hamilton House, Shopping Centre, Elephant and Castle, London SE1 every day. Briefings are held at 1pm daily. The murder suspects are expected to attend the inquiry on 15 June and a demonstration is planned. In case of possible adjournments, please phone the campaign on 0181 690 8830.

Tameside strikers call for support and solidarity

JOHN PEARSON

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Free the Campsfield 9

NICKI JAMESON

On 1 June nine asylum-seekers went on trial at Oxford Crown Court, charged with riot and violent disorder at

centre following the August uprising. The rebellion was sparked off by an attempt to move two detainees to prison without warning. Other detainees feared they had been

the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

▶ In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people – women in particular – trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25%of the population – the majority women and children – lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. ***The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.***

▶ Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. ***The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.***

▶ While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. ***The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights – the right to organise and protest.***

▶ Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties are subject to military occupation and brutal repression. ***The RCG supports the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.***

▶ Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious – low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. ***The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.***

▶ The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. ***We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.***

such a practice was likely to exacerbate disruptive behaviour and increase feelings of victimisation.

It was against this background that the assault at Wormwood Scrubs occurred. On 25 March 1993 I was seriously and savagely assaulted by a group of prison officers in the segregation unit; my 'attitude' had antagonised them. In an attempt to justify their violence, prison officials falsely alleged that I had assaulted a prison officer and that the subsequent restraint and consequent injuries were the result of a lawful use of force. However, official records disclosed to my solicitor revealed not only that the charge of assault against me was dropped, but that criminal acts were committed in attempts to cover up the assault. Letters were sent to an MP and members of my family, alleging that the falsified charge had been investigated by the police and CPS. This was not true. Furthermore, in defiance of numerous court orders, for over three years the Home Office refused to disclose the medical records and X-rays, claiming that they had been mislaid, lost or that no X-rays had been taken.

This is not an isolated case. The Home Office is embroiled in a mass of such litigation. From a personal perspective, the most disturbing aspect is the medical misconduct, which raises the spectre of deaths in custody. Inquest verdicts in relation to deaths in custody range from natural causes to unlawful killing. In none of the verdicts of unlawful killing has there been any subsequent conviction. The relevance of this to my case is that if the Prison Medical Service will collude in covering up an assault, then it would not hesitate to cover up murder.

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Tameside strikers call for support and solidarity

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On 2 June, 250 care workers and members of UNISON and GMB unions at 12 elderly persons' homes in Tameside were sacked by the Tameside Care Group (TCG) in their third month of strike action. When Tameside's Labour council transferred the homes to the privately-run TCG, assurances were given that nationally negotiated pay and conditions would continue to apply. TCG is part-owned (16.6%) by the council; the remaining nominal shares being held by Tameside Community Care Trust, whose trustees include Andrew Bennett, Labour MP and Mike Custance, Tameside NUT branch secretary.

In 1994, a year after the firm experienced financial difficulty and had to be bailed out, UNISON secured a deal transferring its members onto locally negotiated terms, with drastic cuts in sick-pay and shift-pay rates. Annual pay negotiations then produced no rises for three years. By 1997 the workers voted overwhelmingly to strike for a 3% rise. The directors issued 90-day notices to terminate all the workers' contracts. New contracts were offered in which the hourly rates for care assistants would be cut from £4.50 to £3.60, nightcare assistants from £5.65 to £3.60 and domestics from £4.05 to £3.25. Holidays would also be cut and sick pay removed entirely. If the workers did not sign, they would be deemed to have sacked themselves.

The workers began strike action on 30 March, despite threats that they would be sacked for breach of contract. However, picketing began and the firm resorted to scab labour. On 2 June the threat of sackings was carried out.

The GMB then withdrew its support. But students and unemployed workers have supported the strikers and occupied offices of the scabbing agencies.

The Tameside strikers need your support. Donations and solidarity messages to Tameside UNISON, 29 Booth Street, Ashton-under-Lyme, OL6 7LB. Cheques payable to UNISON – Tameside Branch. Phone 0161 308 2452 for details of pickets and other activities.

Free the Campsfield 9

NICKI JAMESON

On 1 June nine asylum-seekers went on trial at Oxford Crown Court, charged with riot and violent disorder at Campsfield Immigration Detention Centre last August. Two of the defendants are just 17-years-old and all nine are from countries in west Africa. Campsfield is run by private security firm Group 4 and has been condemned by, among others, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, who visited the detention

centre following the August uprising. The rebellion was sparked off by an attempt to move two detainees to prison without warning. Other detainees feared they had been killed and up to 100 joined the protest.

Labour Immigration Minister Mike O'Brien has sought to prejudice the trial by claiming that £175,000 worth of damage was done in 'an act of madness'. It is presumably an act of sanity to welcome people fleeing repressive dictatorships, such as that of Nigeria, to Britain by treating them as criminals and incarcerating them in places like Campsfield.

For standing up for their human rights, the nine men now on trial have been further criminalised. Seven have been held in prison and one detained in a secure psychiatric unit, following a serious attempt to commit suicide. On the first day of the court hearing this man's defence team argued that he was not fit to stand trial, but their submission has so far been rejected.

The trial is set to last two months and there will be regular pickets of the court. For further details contact the Campsfield Nine Defence Campaign on 01865 558145/557282/726804 or their website: http://users. ox.ac.uk/~asylum. ■

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▶ The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. ***We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.***

▶ In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. ***The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.***

▶ The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. In power it has never defended the interests of the working class. ***The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.***

▶ The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. ***We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.***

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally. ***The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.***

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 0171 837 1688. Website:
http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~rcgfrfi/rcgfrfi.htm

New slavery old solutions

JASON PRINCE

On 16 May, leaders of the richest nations in the world met in Birmingham at the 'G8' summit to discuss Third World indebtedness. Illusions that something would be done about debt relief were quickly shattered: the meeting broke up an hour early to fit in more important matters, such as even more banqueting, concert-going and, of course, the FA Cup Final.

The official communiqué offered the same old neo-liberal solutions which have led to poverty throughout the world: 'We will work with the international institutions and other creditors to ensure that when they qualify, countries get the relief they need, including interim debt relief measures whenever necessary.'

To qualify for such relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries programme, countries must restrict government spending severely for at least three years, and spend at least a fifth of their export earnings in servicing their debts. One coun-

New Zealand workers and benefit claimants targeted

ANDREW WALTON

Plans by the Coalition Government led by the Tory National Party, in conjuction with the centre-right, populist New Zealand First, will allow workers to be sacked at will in their first six months on the job and compel all welfare claimants to work for their pittance. This amounts to 'forced labour', says Trade Union Federation president Maxine Gay. The fate of employed and unemployed workers is tied closely together. Union leaders should be promoting a united fight back by all workers and claimants. This is what workers should be demanding of their union leaders. The traditional labour movement saying 'United we stand, divided we fall' has never been truer.

Every claimant in NZ could soon be forced into compulsory labour or face losing their benefit. On April 23 NZ First's Employment Minister, Peter McCardle, announced the first details of his workfare scheme. The scheme, also known as the 'Community Wage', has been embraced enthusiastically by his National Party coalition partners. It represents an attack on the entire working class, and the biggest offensive against the unemployed in New Zealand in over 60 years.

There are currently over

from on-the-job discrimination offered by the law.

For their labour they will be paid as little as $21 a week on top of the dole (just over £6) – or just one dollar an hour (approximately 30p). No child-care will be provided or funded. And the scheme won't just affect the unemployed. Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters confirmed that lone parents, widows, invalids and sickness claimants will also be forced to work for their benefits.

In conditions of crisis, capitalism needs a reserve army of labour as a lever to lower the cost of labour. In the past, this reserve army was sustained by the family and by non-capitalist production. Today, however, it depends on state welfare, which involves a deduction from capitalists' profits through the taxation system. And once the unemployed are seen as a cost to all of us as tax payers, it is easy for arguments about the deserving and undeserving poor to rise, it is easier to sell the idea that the unemployed, for whom capitalism has no jobs, are the instruments of their own misfortune. It is for this reason that schemes like 'Workfare' arise, extracting the last pound of flesh from the reserve army of labour and delivering it to the 'deserving' among us.

The proof is before us. The need to implement workfare simply highlights capitalism's inability to deliver what society

Australian dockers on strike

Workers win the first battle

ANTHONY BIDGOOD

On 7 April at midnight, Patricks Stevedores, one of the two major stevedoring companies in Australia (the other being the British transnational P&O), sacked its entire workforce throughout Australia. This action was another effort by the conservative coalition government to destroy the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) – a union representing wharfies (dockers) and seamen.

This ongoing attempt to destroy the MUA brought together the Federal government, especially the Industrial Relations minister Peter Reith, the management of Patricks, the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), who set up their own scab stevedoring company, and Fynwest, a company run by former SAS officers who were to supply the scab labour.

The MUA had been claiming for some months that the Federal government and Patricks

legislation. This legislation was introduced by the current government, but became law only with the support of the Australian Democrats (AD) in the Senate. The legislation outlaws, among other things, secondary boycotts.

Federal government collusion with Patricks was suspected when it offered within hours to fund redundancy payments to the sacked wharfies. A sum of A$250 million was offered. This offer was rejected by the MUA and the wharfies while the government undertook, with considerable media support, a campaign of vilification against the MUA. Wharfies were unproductive, overpaid and rorting (ripping off) the system. The Stock Exchange supported Patricks in the manner that it knows best. The share value of Patricks' parent company, Langs, soared. Corrigan's personal wealth increased by A$1 million in a single day.

The legal arms of the various governments quickly moved to

police had arrived at the docks. As they formed up so did the picketers, arms linked and grabbing hold of the person in front. MUA members formed the front rows.

For two hours there was a tense standoff. Then at 5.30am Martin Kingham, an organiser with the building union, the CFMEU, announced that the CFMEU was calling on its members, then starting work on city construction sites, to walk off the job and come down to the docks. At least 2,000 responded and the police confronting the peaceful picketers found themselves surrounded. The police withdrew. The Federal government and Patricks were outraged but could do little. This victory was a turning point and now the legal battle began to move in the union's favour.

On 21 April a Federal Court judge 'found evidence of an unlawful conspiracy to rid the wharves of union labour' and ordered that all the sacked workers be reinstated. Amazingly this judgement was based on a clause of the anti-union Industrial Relations Act! Appeal after appeal by Patricks failed and the MUA members are at present back at work.

Important though this legal victory was for all workers, of even greater significance was the response from broad sections of the population. With massive cuts in schools and hospitals, increasing use of part-time and contract labour and an official unemployment

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To qualify for such relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries programme, countries must restrict government spending severely for at least three years, and spend at least a fifth of their export earnings in servicing their debts. One country which does not qualify is Jamaica. This is despite the fact that its external debts are larger than its GNP, despite the fact that a quarter of its population lives on less than $2 a day, and despite health spending having been slashed (the doctor:population ratio is 1:7,143). This stands in stark contrast to nearby Cuba, where the doctor: population ratio is 1:176 and infant mortality is 7.2 per 1,000.

In 1980, the total Third World debt stood at $600 billion. In 1997, it is $222 billion for sub-Saharan Africa alone – approximately $370 for every inhabitant. Life is destroyed in the effort to repay this debt: in Niger, where indebtedness stands at 88% of GNP, infant mortality is 318 per 1,000. When a third of the population in the least de-

workers to be sacked at will in their first six months on the job and compel all welfare claimants to work for their pittance. This amounts to 'forced labour', says Trade Union Federation president Maxine Gay. The fate of employed and unemployed workers is tied closely together. Union leaders should be promoting a united fight back by all workers and claimants. This is what workers should be demanding of their union leaders. The traditional labour movement saying 'United we stand, divided we fall' has never been truer.

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There are currently over 148,000 people receiving unemployment, youth or emergency benefits. From 1 October this year, any such claimant:

- could be required to work or 'train' for up to 20 hours a week as directed. If they refuse, their benefits may be stopped for up to 3 months.
- is liable to a 40% cut in their benefit for 'unsatisfactory performance' at their assigned job. They will not get rights to holidays, sick pay or protection

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The proof is before us. The need to implement workfare simply highlights capitalism's inability to deliver what society actually needs.

Socialists, militants and students from Hamilton and Auckland are organising a campaign to stop workfare. 50 people turned out for the first Auckland meeting in April, while 60 turned out in Hamilton.

For further details, New Zealand readers should phone Sue Bradford – Unemployed Workers Rights Centre 09 302 2496 or Andrew Walton RCC 07 854 7264.

International Workers Round-up

Denmark

Workers in the private sector unions defied their leadership by rejecting a pay and conditions package, and voting to

Day demonstrators in Istanbul with batons and water cannons, after blocking their march with armoured vehicles. Fascists joined together with the riot

Australia. This action was another effort by the conservative coalition government to destroy the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) – a union representing wharfies (dockers) and seamen.

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Dockers at Sydney's Docks demonstrating after the sackings

were conspiring to destroy it. In September an attempt was made to set up a non-union stevedoring operation in the small northern port of Cairns. A threatened international ban on the US company involved saw this attempt quickly abandoned. Then in December, Fynwest attempted to train a scab labour force in Dubai from soldiers about to leave the army. This too was abandoned under threats of an international ban on the port of Dubai. Despite

support Patricks. To get around having to use secondary picketing, the MUA invited 'members of the public' to peacefully assemble on the docks. This 'assembly' was continuous and on 16 April a Supreme Court judge ordered the MUA to leave the docks. The scene was set for a confrontation with the police. Using another tactic, the 'anti-monopoly' commission (the ACCC) was threatening to fine the MUA A$750,000 a day.

The MUA however, unlike

with the building union, the CFMEU, announced that the CFMEU was calling on its members, then starting work on city construction sites, to walk off the job and come down to the docks. At least 2,000 responded and the police confronting the peaceful picketers found themselves surrounded. The police withdrew. The Federal government and Patricks were outraged but could do little. This victory was a turning point and now the legal battle began to move in the union's favour.

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Important though this legal victory was for all workers, of even greater significance was the response from broad sections of the population. With massive cuts in schools and hospitals, increasing use of part-time and contract labour and an official unemployment rate of 8 per cent, the MUA's fightback proved to be a catalyst. In April over 3,000 delegates had called for a stop-work rally on 6 May in Melbourne against the Industrial Relations Act. Over 100,000 turned out for the day, marred only by the call by many speakers for the return of a Federal Australian Labor Party government. It was the actions of the former Federal ALP government that had 'set the scene' for the desire to compete globally. One of its agreements in 1989 had halved the dockside workforce, forced through double shifts as the norm and increased productivity by 50 per cent. However this dispute was not about productivity but about breaking the remaining combative trade unions here in order to maintain profits.

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60,000 demonstrators lined the streets of Birmingham to show their support for debt relief and annulment. That their calls were ignored may lead them to a deeper understanding of the forces at work behind the scenes at such meetings. It is the role of communists in this country to help them come to a realisation that capitalism is not in the business of easing suffering, and to offer Cuba as an example of how society can be organised in the interests of people rather than profit. Only by developing a true understanding of late 20th century imperialism will the real role of such leaders be exposed, and the one solution to the problem – socialism – be found. ■

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International Workers Round-up

Denmark

Workers in the private sector unions defied their leadership by rejecting a pay and conditions package, and voting to strike. 500,000 workers (10% of the population) went on strike or were locked out by employers in April, bringing large sections of the country to a standstill – petrol stations ran dry, transport ground to a halt and shop shelves emptied within three days. Unions controlled supplies of petrol, food and medicines, ensuring they got to emergency services and the needy. The strike cost employers over Kr4 billion a day, and had public support. However, after 11 days the Social Democratic-led coalition government passed emergency legislation imposing a settlement and ordered the strikers back to work by midnight 8 May, having conceded only a fraction of the workers' demands.

Turkey

Turkish riot police encased in plastic body armour, referred to as 'Robocops', attacked May Day demonstrators in Istanbul with batons and water cannons, after blocking their march with armoured vehicles. Fascists joined together with the riot police to assault the left-wing protesters, leaving at least 20 injured and detaining 100.

Germany and Poland

In Leipzig, in former East Germany, 6,000 fascists marched on May Day calling for jobs for Germans and the expulsion of immigrants, whilst a force of over 6,000 riot police equipped with helicopters, water cannon and full riot gear attacked left-wing and anti-fascist protesters trying to stop the fascists marching. In the eastern part of Berlin, left-wing May Day demonstrators set fire to barricades and fought running battles using stones and bottles against riot police armed with batons and water cannon. In **Poland**, socialists and communists on a march through Warsaw on May Day carrying red banners and Cuban flags were attacked by several fascist groups.

David Howarth

Dockers at Sydney's Docks demonstrating after the sackings

were conspiring to destroy it. In September an attempt was made to set up a non-union stevedoring operation in the small northern port of Cairns. A threatened international ban on the US company involved saw this attempt quickly abandoned. Then in December, Fynwest attempted to train a scab labour force in Dubai from soldiers about to leave the army. This too was abandoned under threats of an international ban on the port of Dubai. Despite denials at the time, by February this year the Patricks' boss, Chris Corrigan, admitted that he was 'aware' of these efforts. On 8 May the bosses of Fynwest claimed that Patricks had financed the Dubai operation and that the government had been involved in the planning as far back as July 1997. These last claims showed that the object of these operations was to destroy the MUA. How else can one interpret a capitalist enterprise financing the setting up of a 'rival' to 'compete' against it directly?

In January the NFF leased from Patricks part of its Webb Dock facilities in Melbourne. Through a front company, the NFF brought scab labour onto the docks. The MUA replied to this attempt by a series of selective strikes and pickets against Patricks' operation throughout Australia. Like Britain, Australia has draconian anti-union support Patricks. To get around having to use secondary picketing, the MUA invited 'members of the public' to peacefully assemble on the docks. This 'assembly' was continuous and on 16 April a Supreme Court judge ordered the MUA to leave the docks. The scene was set for a confrontation with the police. Using another tactic, the 'anti-monopoly' commission (the ACCC) was threatening to fine the MUA A$750,000 a day.

The MUA however, unlike the British NUM in 1984/85, had not been deserted by other unions. Perhaps because they realised that they had to take a stand on this issue, the trade unions in Victoria had been required to provide members for picket duties and members responded, from the building to the academic sector.

By midnight on 17 April between 3,000-5,000 MUA members and supporters had gathered at East Swanston Dock. Organisers instructed those assembled how to maintain our lines against the expected police assault. Further advice was given on what to do if arrested, who our lawyer was, and not to sign any bail conditions. Thanks to observers in the city everyone was kept informed of police activity, including their progress towards the docks. People were alerted to the possible use of *agents provocateur*. By about 3.30am up to 1,000

massive cuts in schools and hospitals, increasing use of part-time and contract labour and an official unemployment rate of 8 per cent, the MUA's fightback proved to be a catalyst. In April over 3,000 delegates had called for a stop-work rally on 6 May in Melbourne against the Industrial Relations Act. Over 100,000 turned out for the day, marred only by the call by many speakers for the return of a Federal Australian Labor Party government. It was the actions of the former Federal ALP government that had 'set the scene' for the desire to compete globally. One of its agreements in 1989 had halved the dockside workforce, forced through double shifts as the norm and increased productivity by 50 per cent. However this dispute was not about productivity but about breaking the remaining combative trade unions here in order to maintain profits.

The left in Australia is small and marginalised, remnants based on differences from the 1920s and 1960s. It was unable to play any real part in this dispute. Recently there have been small signs of resistance to the policies of the current conservative and former ALP governments. Attempts to form a genuine left reformist party, the progressive Labor Party, are continuing. Some 'left' leaderships in a couple of unions have been replaced by militants not necessarily tied to the ALP. An interview given by Paddy Crumlin, assistant National Secretary of the MUA, was remarkable for the uncharacteristic way in which he spoke about class struggle and the need for socialism.

The MUA dispute continues and claims of government collusion going back to July 1997 ensure that this issue still has a considerable course to run. ■

In brief

Biggest ever workers' demonstration in Taiwan

With 25,000 workers on the streets, the Mayday march in Taiwan was the biggest workers' demonstration the island has ever seen. After decades when all independent workers' organisations were wiped out and replaced by tame unions, this march showed that the workers' movement is being reborn. A new General Federation of Manufacturing Unions is being formed under the guidance of the three main socialist or social-democratic groups, the Taiwan Labour Front, the Committee for Workers' Legislation and the Labour Rights Association.

The majority of Mayday marchers were workers from state-run enterprises which are slated for privatisation. The march also saw a significant attendance by Aboriginal and migrant workers. On the downside, chauvinist ideas on the migrant issue are widespread among Taiwan workers. The bourgeois media have been spreading the idea that unemployment is a result of immigration. With the exception of the Labour Party and Labour Rights Association, labour organisations have failed to challenge these ideas and have even raised demands like 'oppose importing foreign labor and mainland (Chinese) labour.'

Taiwan has stayed relatively unscathed by the Asian economic crisis so far, but if this changes, the migrant workers will be threatened with layoffs and deportation (as has happened in Thailand and Malaysia.) Unless the Taiwan labour

A view from inside:

The state of struggle in South Africa

DALE T MCKINLEY

Over the last few years, a small forest of paper has been dedicated to describing and analysing South Africa's 'transition' from across the 'left' political spectrum. Some have resolutely defended the course taken by the ANC government, others have talked of a wholesale 'sell-out' and capitulation of left forces and a few have attempted to situate their analyses somewhere in an uncomfortable 'middle-ground'. Given this plethora of perspectives, it is imperative that all internationalists continually check their analyses against the every-day reality of revolutionary struggle in South Africa (SA).

We first need to take a cue from Marx's understanding of 'revolutionary epochs':

'In considering such revolutions it is necessary always to distinguish between the material revolution in the economic conditions of production...and the juridical, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in a word, ideological – forms wherein men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.'

Just as Marx saw the possibilities of material (social) revolution as part of a process in which ideological and class conflict are fought out to their revolutionary conclusion, we need to view the ongoing SA 'transition' as constitutive of elements of this revolutionary the words of Lenin, remain 'unresolved issues'. The revolutionary forces in SA have long been conscious of the 'conflict' but have yet to commit themselves to 'fighting it out'. Such recognition, that does not fit neatly into a preconceived notion of where the 'SA revolution should be', either theoretically or practically, might not sit well with many comrades but it is the present reality.

While the political defeat of apartheid opened the space for the revolutionary contestation of all those 'unresolved issues', it simultaneously gave the petit-bourgeois leadership of the ANC ample space to embark on its historic desire to construct a deracialised capitalist order in the 'new' SA. What we are now witnessing across SA is the practical implementation of this desire through the government's much-heralded Growth, Employment & Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic programme.

Infused with all the worst prescriptions of the 'new' imperialist 'order', GEAR's intent is to 'resolve' the aforementioned issues in favour of international and domestic capital. GEAR is a strictly monetarist, 'liberalising' and trickle-down economic programme that is presented as the only 'feasible' socio-economic programme for 'all' South Africans. It seeks to undercut the possibilities of any possible alternative and the clear message it sends is that the workers and poor must, therefore, make tre of the SA struggle and confronts the revolutionary forces with the challenge of 'fighting it out'.

Not surprisingly, the workers and poor of SA are increasingly taking the 'fight' to both the capitalists and the ANC government. Recent weeks have witnessed: several major strikes by unions demanding decent wages; mass demonstrations against the privatisation of ing waged by the SA Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) has been to give weak rhetorical support while simultaneously allowing its investment arm to engage in vigorous bidding wars for the privatisation of state assets. Likewise, the response of the South African Communist Party (SACP) leadership to the 1998 budget – that further entrenches the capitalist, trickle-down economic pro-

basic services; township riots in response to local council's 'credit control' measures; and invasions of unoccupied land by landless masses in both rural and urban areas.

Unfortunately, the parallel response of most union and 'left' political leadership has been consistent with the revolutionary timidity displayed gramme of the ANC government – was to welcome it as 'a generally constructive and well-balanced approach to meeting the social delivery needs of our society.'

This is not to say that ideological battles are not being fought out within the revolutionary forces themselves. At present, serious contestation over politi-

tional leadership to the struggles taking place has resulted in much revolutionary energy being wasted and has opened the door to populist demagogy. All the while, the ANC government rushes headlong into the madness of the market in its pursuit of the 'new' class interests of its leadership.

The possibilities of carrying forward the struggle in SA in the direction of socialism rest on the willingness and ability of revolutionary forces to take the fight to the class enemy. It is now clear to the vast majority of workers and poor that this class enemy is not solely to be found in the ranks of white capitalists. Likewise, that the answers to their continuing racial and class oppression do not solely lie with affirmative action programmes and so-called 'black economic empowerment' initiatives. That is precisely why they are looking to organised revolutionary forces to give ideological and programmatic content to the battles that must be fought.

All of this gives the present situation in SA an undeniable importance, not only for South Africans, but for all revolutionaries wherever they might be. It is now time for all revolutionary internationalists to forge the closest of ties, differences notwithstanding – to join in a common battle against a common enemy. Too many opportunities have already been missed!

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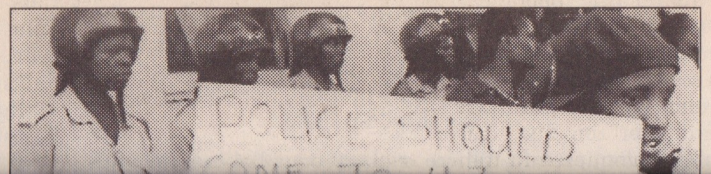
Letter from Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's economy is in crisis. The price of tobacco, which is by far the largest foreign currency earner, dropped to US$1.27 per kilo – about half last year's price. Farmers, both



senile old fool. Now she is the former Minister, while Strive has been added to the list of possible successors to Mugabe. Strive Masiyiwa may, however, be reluctant – a former prospective candidate was killed in a car crash. South African forensic experts say that the hoses in his brake lin-

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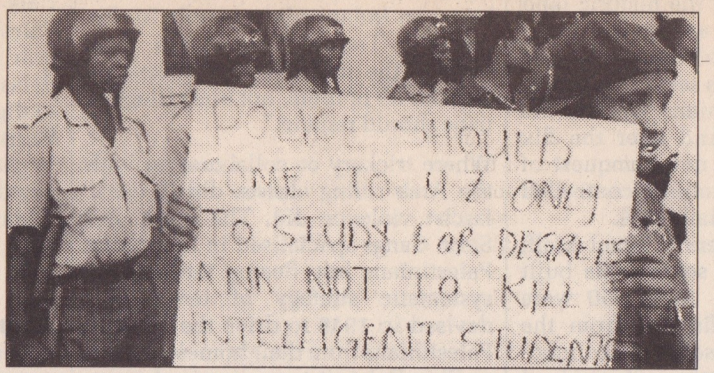


University students are challenging corruption

The tobacco price-drop put Roger Boka, the main shareholder in the Boka Tobacco floor (said to be the largest in the World and the spearhead of indigenisation), into difficulty. His bank, the United Merchant Bank, closed its doors and Boka was declared to be 'specified' – subject to investigation for corruption. Records have disappeared and unauthorised promissory notes on the Cold Storage Commission have been issued involving an alleged fraud of Z$968 million. It looks like there may be a knock-on effect to the other corrupted. One is reminded of J B Galbraith's 'bezzle' in his book on the 1929 crash.

In like vein, cheques issued by the Municipal Council of Harare have allegedly bounced to the tune of Z$80 million. But not to worry, the cost of the executive Mayor of Harare's new mansion has now reached Z$30 million. He, on the other hand, is threatening to have the multitude of illegal shacks, each housing a family, built in the backyards of high density areas, demolished by the end of the month. In Bulawayo, the second largest city and rather a backwater, the City Council is planning to build a mayoral mansion for Z$10 million. Meanwhile thousands of Bulawayo residents are without accommodation.

Strive Masiyiwa has won his protracted battle through the courts for his cellphone organisation, Econet (Enhanced Communications Network), to be the private sector licensee for cellphone operations. The license had previously been awarded elsewhere and when Joshua Nkomo, acting as President during one of Mugabe's frequent absences from Zimbabwe, told the Minister of Posts to award the contract to Strive, she told him that he was a senile old fool. Now she is the former Minister, while Strive has been added to the list of possible successors to Mugabe. Strive Masiyiwa may, however, be reluctant – a former prospective candidate was killed in a car crash. South African forensic experts say that the hoses in his brake linings had been cut.

Following the award of Z$2000 a month pensions to ex-combatants, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions is demanding a minimum wage of Z$2,000 a month and is reported to be planning a five-day general strike. Inflation is raging, the Zimbabwe dollar is crashing against major currencies and the deficit in the balance of payments is the biggest in a long time. This hampers the performance of the agricultural and mining sectors as imported inputs are becoming more expensive. Many mining concerns have closed down while those remaining are rationalising with a loss of 5,000 jobs.

Students have been protesting about inflation for a long time. Recently their demonstrations have been banned by the police. A huge demonstration followed a successful court challenge to the ban and the Vice-Chancellor joined in. The protest was absolutely without violence, but down the side streets trucks full of riot police, fully armoured, were parked. On 29 May, the students again demonstrated for higher grants and against corruption – this time making the connection with Indonesia, promising that Mugabe will meet the same fate as Suharto. Days of rioting provoked by the police followed and the university is now closed indefinitely. The police have problems too. Every month a hundred police members die of AIDS, which has reached epidemic proportions here.

Now that ESAP (the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme) has been completed, engendering widespread disaster, the second phase of reform has been launched. Zimprest (Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation) seeks to achieve a growth rate of 6%, halve the budget deficit, improve savings and investment by an average of 23% of GDP and at least 9% growth in exports. Fat chance. The Auditor-General has reported that all government departments completely disregard the spending limits. Corruption is widespread: public officials get loans for this and that and never repay them. There is a recent report that the Minister of Finance, Dr Murerwa, has not accounted for the spending of millions of dollars of public money.

However the IMF is pleased and has undertaken to provide Z$3 billion a year for three years. Somehow the money doesn't come through so NGO donors are hesitating. The British have withheld aid in the form of 1,200 Landrovers intended to replace police Santanas. They are worried that the land acquisition policy here might be breaching the sanctity of private property. The new British High Commissioner has gone so far as to hold an economic conference to which the government was not invited.

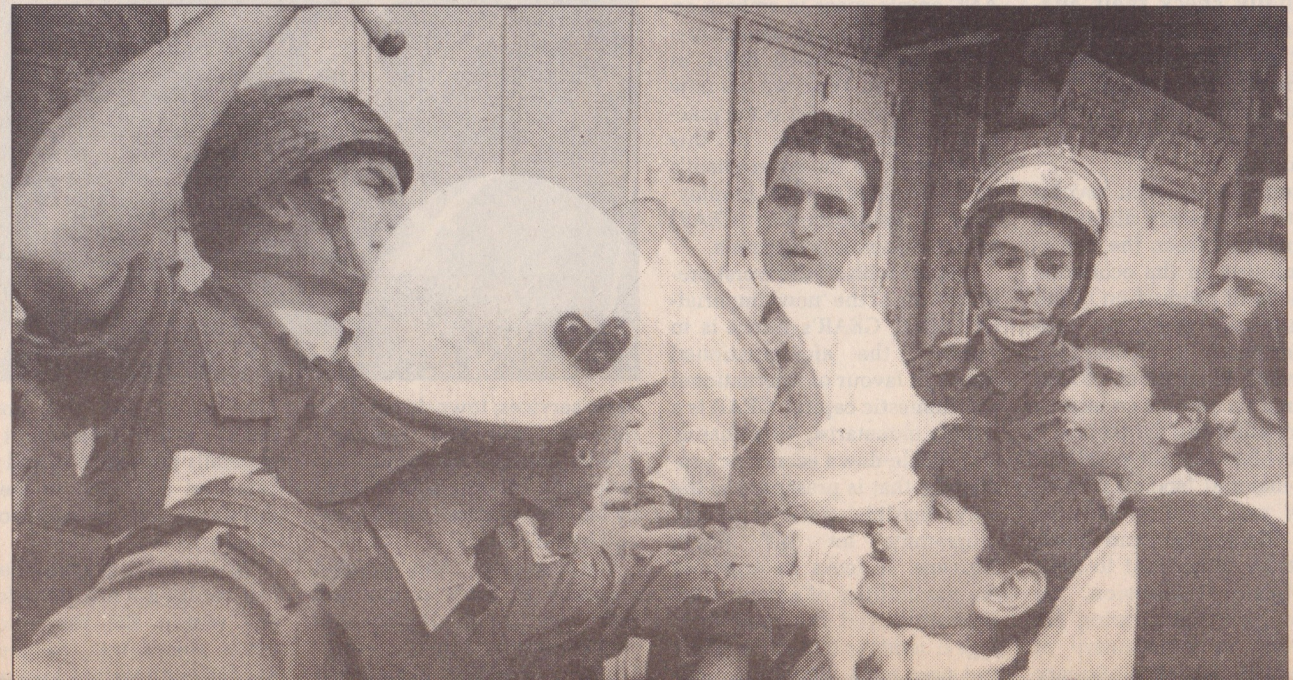
President Mugabe continues on his international perambulations. In Namibia he came out with his usual homophobia. He also attended the first anniversary of Kabila's victory in the DRC, where Thabo Mbeki (ANC President-to-be) chided Kabila for planning national elections too soon. The latter has been complaining of his bad press in the West. But Mugabe has now cancelled a visit to the California State Polytechnic University in June to receive an honorary doctorate and to give a keynote speech. There was opposition on the campus following his remarks about Jews and gays: the granting of the doctorate was opposed by the university Senate. There is lots of criticism of the President here too. But it's wrong to practise the cult of the denunciation of individual geriatrics – after all it's just the usual workings of capitalism which they have all so thoroughly embraced. The rich are getting richer.

David Kitson

'I don't understand your optimism. Why should the Arabs make peace? If I was an Arab leader I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural; we have taken their country.' *Ben-Gurion, first Israeli Prime Minister*

ISRAEL
50 years of racism and genocide

EDDIE ABRAHAMS examines the violent genesis of the Israeli state.



The 50-year history of Israel is the history of its development by means of the violent dispossession and attempted destruction of the Palestinian people. In this it shares much in common with the history of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Hendrik Verwoerd, that most notorious of South Africa's prime ministers, stated in 1961 that 'The Jews took Israel from the Arabs after the Arabs had lived there for a thousand years...Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state.' The only significant difference is that Israel continues to enjoy the full military, economic and political support of today's great powers, in return for its role in securing the Middle East and its oil wealth for imperialism. Indeed, throughout its 50-year history Israel has received billions of dollars in US aid, and since 1967 an average of $3bn annually.

The post-modernist contempt for historical knowledge serves only to disguise the truth that Israel and democracy, Israel and the rights of the Palestinian people, cannot co-exist. Israeli history demonstrates that the Middle East 'peace process' has nothing whatsoever to do with granting democratic rights to the Palestinian people. It is about how to ensure that an independent Palestinian state is rendered impossible, whilst at the same time legitimising the Zionist conquest and settlement of a vast proportion of Palestine. The Palestinian people, however, have never bent the knee to Zionist colonisation and for 50 years have fought and continue to fight against the racist settler state that is Israel.

Indeed, on 14 May, the very eve of the Zionists' 50th anniversary celebrations, Palestinians took to the streets to protest against the denial of statehood to the Palestinian people. The Israeli response was typical. Their soldiers killed six Palestinians, including two eight-year-old children, and injured over 180. Days before, when Hillary Clinton, wife of the US President, expressed support for a Palestinian state, official Israeli

It was methods such as these that led to 750,000 Palestinians fleeing their homeland leaving behind wealth and property which were then stolen by Zionist settlers. 'Population transfer expert' Schechtman wrote: 'It is difficult to overestimate the tremendous role this list of abandoned property has played in the settlement of hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants who have reached Israel since 1948.'

The 'peace process' and the West Bank

These same processes have been at work ever since. In the 30 years since the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, some 300,000 Zionists settlers have seized control of 70% of the land. According to *Nekuda*, a Zionist settler publication, by 1997 the number of settlers had increased by about 50% since the signing of the 'peace accords'. These fully-armed settlers occupy 130 settlements dotted around the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Strategically placed, with state-funded programmes for massive expansion, together with Israeli army roadblocks, they ensure that the major Palestinian population centres are reduced to isolated clusters, dependent entirely on Israeli authority. A system of 58 roadblocks prevents Palestinians from travelling from the south to the north of the West Bank.

Fifty years of unbridled Israeli self-determination have brought the Palestinian people to the edge of destruction. The 'peace process' has further weakened the Palestinian economy. Today there is no free passage between the supposedly autonomous Gaza and the autonomous regions of the West Bank. All commercial traffic between these areas is in Israeli hands. In the most recent stages of the 'peace process' negotiations Israel has refused to allow Palestinians an airport in the Gaza lest this enable them to create independent links with the outside world, ones which would enable

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Only a gullible ignoramus could believe that Israeli opposition to Palestinian self-determination is motivated by the ideal of world peace. The reality is that the Palestinian people are denied self-determination, so that Israel's colonialist, ethnic cleansing 'self-determination' can continue in an unbridled manner, as it has done for the past 50 years.

50 years of racism and genocide

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Some 20 years later, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war when Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Sinai, Abba Ebban, at the time the Israeli Foreign Minister, declared that: 'Increased Jewish immigration will add to the strength of our gains in the war; it is not enough to occupy the territories, we must settle them too.'

Nothing in this regard has changed. Today, during the so-called peace-process Netanyahu insists: 'They [Palestinians] cannot expect to get 90% or 100% of the West Bank. They have no right to expect it and no reason to expect it.' Instead he offers the Palestinians less than 10% of the area, without the right to form an independent state.

Urging the imperial powers to back

1945, three years before the foundation of Israel Zionists still owned only 14% of the land compared to the 80% owned by the Palestinians. But in 1948 750,000 of the 1.3m Palestinians, ie over half the population was forced to flee – to Jordan, Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world. In that same year the State of Israel was founded on 72% of the historic land of Palestine. Even as the UN partitioned Palestine between Arab and Zionist, the Zionists seized land allocated to the Palestinians. By 1953 the figure was 73%. And after the Six Day war, with the new conquest of the West Bank, Zionists controlled 84% to the Palestinians 14%.

Within the borders of Israel itself, of the 370 Zionist settlements built between 1948 and 1953, 350 were

from working on land purchased by the Zionists. There was to be no place in the Israeli state for any Palestinian. Zionist leader Joseph Weitz remarked:

'Among ourselves it must be clear that there is no place in the country for both peoples together. With the Arabs we shall not achieve our aim of being an independent people in this country. Transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, transfer all of them, not one village or tribe should remain.'

Where trickery or collaboration with the Arab ruling classes didn't work, fascist violence did. The Irgun and Stern Gangs specialised in terrorising Palestinians into fleeing the land. A systematic strategy of terror was

Zionists settlers have seized control of 70% of the land. According to *Nekuda*, a Zionist settler publication, by 1997 the number of settlers had increased by about 50% since the signing of the 'peace accords'. These fully-armed settlers occupy 130 settlements dotted around the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Strategically placed, with state-funded programmes for massive expansion, together with Israeli army roadblocks, they ensure that the major Palestinian population centres are reduced to isolated clusters, dependent entirely on Israeli authority. A system of 58 roadblocks prevents Palestinians from travelling from the south to the north of the West Bank.

Fifty years of unbridled Israeli self-determination have brought the Palestinian people to the edge of destruction. The 'peace process' has further weakened the Palestinian economy. Today there is no free passage between the supposedly autonomous Gaza and the autonomous regions of the West Bank. All commercial traffic between these areas is in Israeli hands. In the most recent stages of the 'peace process' negotiations Israel has refused to allow Palestinians an airport in the Gaza lest this enable them to create independent links with the outside world, ones which would enable them to break the vice-like Israeli grip on their economy.

Israel has also used the tactic of repeated closures of all West Bank and Gaza borders to severely damage Palestinian trade. It is, for example, frequently much cheaper for West Bank traders to import tomatoes from Spain than from Gaza. Palestinian produce is regularly left to rot at Israeli roadblocks and prohibitions are imposed on importing raw materials into areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority. On land requiring intensive water irrigation, Palestinians have virtually no rights to dig new wells, even as water from Palestinian areas is siphoned off to irrigate land confiscated and cultivated by the colonial population. Today the settlers who account for only 13% of the population consume 80% of the West Bank's water.

dren, and injured over 180. Days before, when Hillary Clinton, wife of the US President, expressed support for a Palestinian state, official Israeli protest and Zionist media uproar was so powerful it forced the White House to issue an official statement to the effect that Hillary Clinton was expressing only her personal view, not US policy. Rejecting Palestinian demands for statehood, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu commented that one of the 'greatest dangers to the peace of the world as we enter the 21st century is the proliferation of the idea of unbridled self-determination.'

Only a gullible ignoramus could believe that Israeli opposition to Palestinian self-determination is motivated by the ideal of world peace. The reality is that the Palestinian people are denied self-determination, so that Israel's colonialist, ethnic cleansing 'self-determination' can continue in an unbridled manner, as it has done for the past 50 years.

When Zionists speak the truth

The founders of Israel shared the reactionary and racist mentality of the major imperialist powers of the time. So venomous and ingrained was their racism, so dismissive and contemptuous were they of the humanity of Palestinian people, so indifferent to Palestinian and Arab opinion, that they did not bother to disguise the predatory character of their enterprise. Yeshaayahu Ben-Porat, a leading Zionist ideologist, declared:

'There is no Zionist settlement, and there is no Jewish state, without displacing Arabs and without confiscating lands and fencing them off.'

As to how much Palestinian land was to be 'fenced off', Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel was equally frank and forthright:

'Take the American Declaration of Independence for instance. It contains no mention of the territorial limits. We are not obliged to state the limits of our state.'

Some 20 years later, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war when Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Sinai, Abba Ebban, at the time the Israeli Foreign Minister, declared that: 'Increased Jewish immigration will add to the strength of our gains in the war; it is not enough to occupy the territories, we must settle them too.'

Nothing in this regard has changed. Today, during the so-called peace-process Netanyahu insists: 'They [Palestinians] cannot expect to get 90% or 100% of the West Bank. They have no right to expect it and no reason to expect it.' Instead he offers the Palestinians less than 10% of the area, without the right to form an independent state.

Urging the imperial powers to back the Zionist colonisation of Palestine, Theodore Herzl, the first theoretician of Zionism, said: 'For Europe we shall create there in Palestine an outpost against Asia, we shall be the vanguard of the civilised world against barbarism.' He added: 'And so I believe in England that the idea of Zionism, which is a colonial idea, should easily be understood.' This colonial idea is at the heart of Zionism. And it is a thread that links Israel's past to its present.

The colonisation of Palestine

In 1882 there were 24,000 Jews in Palestine. The Arab population numbered 450,000. In 1917 there were 60,000 Jews compared to 700,000 Arabs. Arabs owned 91% of the land of Palestine. Jews owned 4%. Others owned the rest. In the following decades this picture was dramatically reversed. Jews constituted 11% of the population of Palestine in 1922. By 1931 they were 17%. In 1936 the figure rises to 28% and in 1943 it reaches 31% of the population. In 1945, three years before the foundation of Israel Zionists still owned only 14% of the land compared to the 80% owned by the Palestinians. But in 1948 750,000 of the 1.3m Palestinians, ie over half the population was forced to flee – to Jordan, Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world. In that same year the State of Israel was founded on 72% of the historic land of Palestine. Even as the UN partitioned Palestine between Arab and Zionist, the Zionists seized land allocated to the Palestinians. By 1953 the figure was 73%. And after the Six Day war, with the new conquest of the West Bank, Zionists controlled 84% to the Palestinians 14%.

Within the borders of Israel itself, of the 370 Zionist settlements built between 1948 and 1953, 350 were built on land confiscated from the Palestinians and used to accommodate the 684,000 settlers who arrived in the same period. Meanwhile, since 1948 385 Palestinian villages have been destroyed.

This transformation of Palestine into 'Israel' was achieved by means of brute force, by means of war, population expulsion, repression and terror. Palestinian resistance to Zionist colonisation was suppressed and defeated only by the British army and police forces who collaborated with and built up the Zionist military and economic machine during the Palestinian general strike and uprising from 1936-39.

The methods of conquest

Zionist settlement had begun with the purchase of land from reactionary Arab feudal lords and the expulsion of the Palestinian peasants who lived on that land. In their stead Jewish immigrants were put to work on the land. A rigid apartheid regime was at once installed. Arabs were banned from working on land purchased by the Zionists. There was to be no place in the Israeli state for any Palestinian. Zionist leader Joseph Weitz remarked:

'Among ourselves it must be clear that there is no place in the country for both peoples together. With the Arabs we shall not achieve our aim of being an independent people in this country. Transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, transfer all of them, not one village or tribe should remain.'

Where trickery or collaboration with the Arab ruling classes didn't work, fascist violence did. The Irgun and Stern Gangs specialised in terrorising Palestinians into fleeing the land. A systematic strategy of terror was devised in 1948 to drive the 750,000 Palestinians from their homes. Known as Plan Dalet, it was organised genocide. On 9 April 1948, terrorist killers from Irgun led by Menachem Begin (a future Prime Minister) attacked the village of Deir Yassin and massacred 250 defenceless men, women and children. A witness, Red Cross Doctor de Reynier said: 'All I could think of was the SS troops I had seen in Athens.' Begin sent his troops a message: 'Accept congratulations on this splendid act of conquest.'

Deir Yassin was no isolated act. In the village of Safsaf, 70 men were blindfolded and shot dead. In Elabun, Zionist commanders lined the inhabitants up in the village square, shouting 'You want to make war, here you have it!' and gunned down 13 people. In Safed, while there were no massacres, captured prisoners were tortured to death. A Zionist witness recalls how she saw an intelligence officer 'beat these [ten] wounded men with a hoe until they bled to death.'

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Zionism, yesterday and today

Whilst the Palestinian people have remained uncompromising, the tiny Palestinian ruling elite along with the regional Arab ruling classes have paid no heed to Ben-Gurion's advice never to make terms with Israel. Yassar Arafat and the Palestinian Authority have sold the Palestinian birthright for a mess of potage. In return for some minor privileges for a tiny stratum of wealthy Palestinians or Palestinian Authority officials, Arafat is making terms with Israel, which will lead to the further dispossession and impoverishment of ordinary Palestinians. The Palestinian people, whatever Yassar Arafat agrees with the Zionists, are not acquiescing. The Intifada uprising in the mid-1980s and the uprising of September 1996 were the most recent manifestations of their anger and their determination to resist. They are fighting a life and death battle for their future. In this battle we know which side we are on. ■

Ireland's Peace Agreement

On 22 May, in referendums in the north and south of Ireland, the majority of voters supported the so-called Peace Agreement reached by all parties in Stormont on 10 April. In the Six Counties, in a turnout of 81%, over 71% voted for the Agreement. It is estimated that over 90% of nationalists voted yes. The fact that such an overwhelming number of nationalists supported the Agreement, which legitimises the Partition of Ireland, reflects the crisis which has faced the Republican Movement since the defeat of the hunger strike in 1981. Over the last 17 years, there has been no progress towards self-determination, no real prospect of British withdrawal, nor an end to discrimination and economic deprivation for the nationalist working class. On the contrary, the promise of constitutional settlement has been substituted for any anti-imperialist perspective, and in these circumstances that the nationalist working class voted yes is no surprise.

The Peace Agreement sets up a Northern Ireland Assembly which will have full legislative and executive powers and will be elected by proportional representation. It enshrines the Unionist veto over the future of the Six Counties, stating: 'the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, freely exercised and legitimate, is to maintain the Union... it would be wrong to make any change in the status of Northern Ireland save with the consent of a majority of its people'. The three strands of government – the Assembly, the north-south Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council – consolidate and strengthen British imperialism's control over the whole of Ireland.

The causes of conflict

Nothing in the Agreement tackles the underlying causes of the conflict – the sectarianism, discrimination and economic deprivation faced by the working class in the north. Even during the 'halcyon days' of the ceasefire Loyalist and British Army repression in working class districts has been the order of the day. For example:

- Loyalists fire-bombed a Catholic home in Larne, part of an ongoing campaign to drive Catholic families out of the area.
- In Belfast a loyalist mob attacked Nationalists on the Crumlin Road

Concessions to republicanism?

Much has been made of the 'concessions' to Sinn Fein included in the Agreement, namely the release of prisoners and the restructuring of the RUC. Both however are conditional. Only prisoners who are members of organisations that support the Agreement and keep the ceasefire will be released. They will be released individually and only on licence. Their continuing freedom will depend not only on their own conduct but also the conduct of their organisation – if the ceasefire is breached they could return to gaol. Tony Blair made the British government position clear when he intervened to strengthen the position of David Trimble (Ulster Unionist Party) on the eve of a crucial meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council: 'There is no question of any remission or early release unless the organisation and the individuals themselves have given up violence and are safe to be let out into the community.' The British clearly hope that the ex-prisoners will form a conservative bloc within the Republican Movement.

The RUC will be looked at by an 'independent commission' headed by Chris Patten, former Thatcherite Tory Minister and Governor of Hong Kong. Blair has also set out the terms: the RUC will not be disbanded and its officers will be treated with

process was opposed and attacked by a mass campaign comprising the prisoners themselves, the IRA military campaign and large street protests and campaigns led by the prisoners' relatives formed in Relatives Action Committees. Their campaign was for political status – recognition that they were prisoners of war, not criminals. The intensity of the campaign, the courage of the prisoners, and the mobilisation of the republican working class did not just frighten the British – sections of the Sinn Fein leadership were intent on ensuring that they did not lose control. In much the same way that the exiled ANC leadership in South Africa wrested control from leading militants who had led the movement internally, the Sinn Fein leadership took control of the prisoners' campaign, diverted it away from the political status demand and from confrontation, towards a set of five humanitarian demands which would not offend the middle class. As Gerry Adams said at the time: 'for those who are unable to support the armed struggle in the north, there is nothing in the demands put forward by the committee [National Smash H-Block Campaign] which cannot be supported on humanitarian grounds.'

Throughout the hunger strikes of 1980/81 Sinn Fein concentrated more and more on building alliances

tionary nationalist strategy of the Republican Movement... this pressure has revealed differences of view on the way forward within the Republican Movement.'

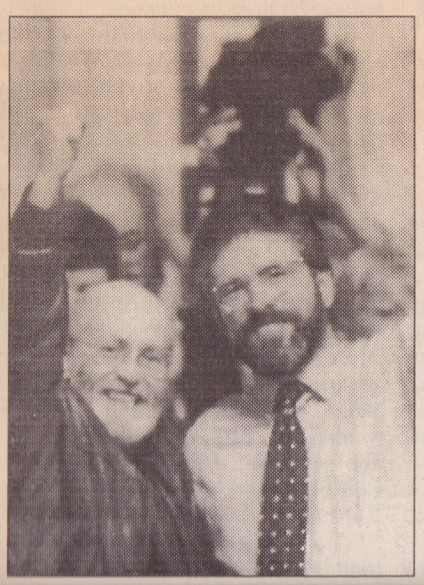
The acceptance of the Peace Agreement and Sinn Fein's overt reformist strategy represent, for the time being, the resolution of these differences in favour of the middle class, and to the benefit of British imperialism. It has long been the avowed aim of British imperialism to divide the Republican Movement, isolating the revolutionaries and drawing a section into constitutional politics.

The future

In a statement following the ceasefire of August 1994 we wrote in FRFI:

'The struggle is not over. The economic, political and social problems which keep forcing the national struggle onto the political agenda still remain. The Six Counties is a sectarian statelet. British imperialism has not left Ireland. The political prisoners are still in gaol. The nationalist working class faces massive economic deprivation and discrimination, with unemployment levels more than twice those of the loyalist working class. Should the Sinn Fein leadership be drawn into any proposed 'New Ireland' administration,

such an overwhelming number of nationalists supported the Agreement, which legitimises the Partition of Ireland, reflects the crisis which has faced the Republican Movement since the defeat of the hunger strike in 1981. Over the last 17 years, there has been no progress towards self-determination, no real prospect of British withdrawal, nor an end to discrimination and economic deprivation for the nationalist working class. On the contrary, the promise of constitutional settlement has been substituted for any anti-imperialist perspective, and in these circumstances that the nationalist working class voted yes is no surprise.



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- In Belfast a loyalist mob attacked Nationalists on the Crumlin Road with bricks and missiles, leaving a 12-year-old child with a fractured skull.
- In Lurgan, the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR) has continually harassed nationalist youth. The father of Kevin Scullion, who has been attacked repeatedly by the RIR, said 'the RIR is out of control. Every time they come on to the Kilwilke Estate, six landrovers at a time, people are assaulted, physically and verbally.'
- Before the referendum, two nationalists were murdered by loyalist terror gangs: Adrian Lamph was shot as he worked in a council yard in the loyalist heartland of Portadown; Ciaran Heffron, a student, was murdered as he walked home from the pub. Loyalists also set off a no-warning bomb outside a pub in Armagh City on 25 April.

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A step forward?

Sinn Fein has argued that the Agreement represents a step forward for nationalists: that they are in a transitional process which could, in the words of Gerry Adams: 'provide a pragmatic route to our ultimate goal'. However, in Martin McGuinness's report on the Agreement to the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, he acknowledged Sinn Fein's political weakness and put forward the leadership's strategy for building their political strength:

'A united Ireland was not attainable in this phase, not just because of Unionist opposition, but because of all the participants only Sinn Fein was advocating and promoting that objective. To the extent that our political strength permitted us to progress the process was opposed and attacked by a mass campaign comprising the prisoners themselves, the IRA military campaign and large street protests and campaigns led by the prisoners' relatives formed in Relatives Action Committees. Their campaign was for political status – recognition that they were prisoners of war, not criminals. The intensity of the campaign, the courage of the prisoners, and the mobilisation of the republican working class did not just frighten the British – sections of the Sinn Fein leadership were intent on ensuring that they did not lose control. In much the same way that the exiled ANC leadership in South Africa wrested control from leading militants who had led the movement internally, the Sinn Fein leadership took control of the prisoners' campaign, diverted it away from the political status demand and from confrontation, towards a set of five humanitarian demands which would not offend the middle class. As Gerry Adams said at the time: 'for those who are unable to support the armed struggle in the north, there is nothing in the demands put forward by the committee [National Smash H-Block Campaign] which cannot be supported on humanitarian grounds.'

Throughout the hunger strikes of 1980/81 Sinn Fein concentrated more and more on building alliances with the middle class, attempting to force the SDLP and Fianna Fail to support the hunger strikers and thereby pressurise the British government. This was the beginning of the Pan-Nationalist Front strategy. The real route to pressurising the British – a militant working class movement – was sidelined. The denouement came with the death of Bobby Sands. With the explosion of anger sweeping Ireland, north and south, the working class youth of Dublin took to the streets with stones and petrol bombs and the slogan 'Gardai-RUC'. The National H-Block Committee condemned them as 'small and unrepresentative elements'. Events in Dublin were cancelled in order to stop them disrupting the 'peaceful and dignified demonstrations'. A great opportunity to draw an important section of the tionary nationalist strategy of the Republican Movement...this pressure has revealed differences of view on the way forward within the Republican Movement.'

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The Peace Agreement will be judged by the nationalist working class on what happens on their estates and in their communities. There is nothing to indicate that their daily lives will change. As communists we recognise that the root cause of their problems is the sectarian Six County statelet, and its occupation by the British Army. The reformist settlement will not change this, and so the revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle will have to be rebuilt.

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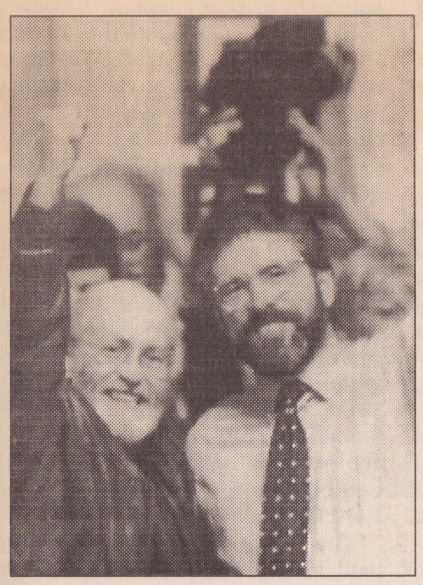

At the Ard Fheis the prisoners, released for the occasion, received an justifiably ecstatic welcome. The Peace Agreement offers only conditional release on licence.

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• In the Newington area of North Belfast, nationalist families have been under nightly attack from loyalists hurling bricks and bottles at the homes. The RUC has shown no interest in the situation, in contrast to its continuing attempts to recruit informers.

• Complaints against the RUC have risen 22% over the past year, but of 1,161 complaints received by the Independent Commission on Police Complaints, only seven have led to formal disciplinary proceedings.

Unemployment rates for nationalist working class areas of the Six Counties are close to double those of loyalist areas. Job discrimination continues: a survey carried out by Sinn Fein showed that in Belfast, with a Catholic population approaching 45%, the City Council's craft grades are made up of just 16% Catholics, and the manual grades 34.7%.

The Peace Agreement cannot lay the basis for tackling these problems because it reinforces the cause of the problems – the sectarian statelet of Northern Ireland.

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'A united Ireland was not attainable in this phase, not just because of Unionist opposition, but because of all the participants only Sinn Fein was advocating and promoting that objective. To the extent that our political strength permitted us to promote all our positions, we did so. *A stronger electoral mandate would conceivably have affected the outcome of the talks in any number of ways.* We need to learn the lesson of that. We need to build on our electoral mandate to shape the many negotiations which challenge us in the future.' (our emphasis)

On this basis the Ard Fheis agreed to allow elected Sinn Fein members to take their seats in the new Assembly – a historic turnaround for a party which has always refused to take seats in Parliament or at Stormont. The leadership will now concentrate its efforts on winning votes and Assembly seats. Constitutional politics have become the only way forward for Sinn Fein.

The reformist road

This position has not just appeared out of the blue. It is part of a process which began during the prisoners' courageous struggle in the 1970s. Political status was taken away from the prisoners by the Labour government in 1976. This criminalisation

Campaign] which cannot be supported on humanitarian grounds.'

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A month before his death, Bobby Sands was elected MP in a remarkable by-election victory demonstrating the support for the prisoners' struggle. Danny Morrison, at that time in the leadership of Sinn Fein, and who coined the phrase 'ballot box and armalite strategy', wrote in *The Guardian* on 11 May 1998:

'Until that point it was impossible to envisage a set of circumstances which would allow a military-oriented movement to make a smooth transition into politics without splitting and feuding.'

Analysing the 'ballot box and armalite strategy' in 1983 in our book *Ireland – the key to the British revolution* we stated:

'The unprecedented electoral successes of Sinn Fein have inevitably generated pressure from bourgeois nationalist and opportunist forces aimed at undermining the revolu-

more than twice those of the loyalist working class. Should the Sinn Fein leadership be drawn into any proposed 'New Ireland' administration, in the Six Counties or 26 Counties, and have conferred upon it the status of privileged bourgeois parliamentarians, it will find itself in conflict with the nationalist working class – those people of no property who have always been the bedrock of the anti-imperialist struggle.' (FRFI 121 Oct/Nov 1994)

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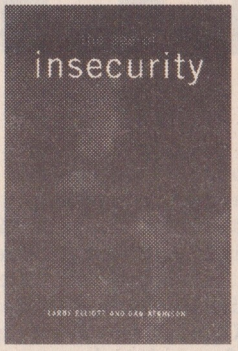
It must now be clear that the strategy of 'ballot box and armalite', leads inevitably to the ballot box alone and to compromise with British imperialism. Only the leadership of the nationalist working class can ensure that the movement of the future is grounded not in these phoney counter strategies and slogans, but in the pursuit of independent working class interests, using whatever means they deem necessary. This does not boil down to a simple continuation of armed struggle. The future movement must be built on the political lessons of Sinn Fein's failure.

Our task is, as it has always been, to support the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland. In doing so we recognise that most of the British left has repeatedly failed the Irish movement in a most cowardly fashion, refusing to confront British imperialism's brutal role, and repeatedly covering up for the Labour Party's vile treachery. The RCG is committed to support for the anti-imperialist movement, opposition to British imperialism, and the defeat of Labour's opportunism.

Bob Shepherd

The age of anxiety



Insecurity has been a permanent feature in the lives of the vast majority of working class people throughout the history of capitalism. This also has been true, outside the exceptional three decades of the post-1945 boom, for large sections of the working class in the rich western imperialist countries. So when two *Guardian* economic journalists write a book on the 'deep-rooted insecurity affecting our lives in an age of untrammelled finance', their primary concern is not with the working class. *The Age of Insecurity*[1] gives political expression to the anxiety of growing numbers of the commercial and professional middle class threatened with proletarianisation by the neo-liberal policies of Blair's Labour government.

DAVID YAFFE examines yet another attempt to forge a political economy of the new middle class.

A press release calls the book 'the most important political book' since Will Hutton's *The State We're In*. In some respects it is very similar. Both books contain a sustained and scathing attack on neo-liberal policies. Both are fearful of the political consequences if such policies are not constrained. Hutton warns of social breakdown and the return of totalitarian parties of right and left, Elliott and Atkinson (E&A) that a collapse of western capitalism – though unlikely at present – would 'take most of us with it' (p252).

They all call for a return to Keynes – but not 'the bastardised Keynesian corporatism of the 1960s and 1970s' (Hutton), or the Keynesian 'excesses of big government' or of a 'cavalier approach to budget deficits' (E&A p261). The middle classes would not tolerate that. They seek the Keynes who believed that 'capitalism should not be left to its own devices... and (that) capitalism did have to be carefully managed' (E&A p261-2); the Keynes 'who offered the world an unparalleled period of prosperity' (Hutton); who believed in putting 'severe restrictions on the mobility of capital' (E&A p262) and whose programme today 'would entail a transformation of the way the financial system worked' (Hutton). They seek the 'authentic' Keynes, untarnished by the failure of Keynesianism in the crisis of the 1970s.

Both books argue that a successful capitalism requires a flourishing middle class and both are therefore concerned with promoting its interests. Hutton argues concretely that they will break with neo-liberalism only if they are given a vested interest in the system by 'incorporating inequality into the public domain'. E&A, more idealistically, appear to have written their book primarily to convince the middle classes of the error of their ways in accepting the free-market 'culture', by demonstrating, among other things, that they were much better off in the post-war Keynesian economy than under today's authoritarian, unstable and threatening free-market capitalism

ing of the political, social and cultural changes that we associate with Thatcherism.[3]

It is precisely now that neo-liberalism 'has failed, even in its own terms, and left the global economy unstable and poised on the brink of a social and environmental chasm' (p14), that this book and others like it are being written. The aim is to show that the system can be saved if only the middle classes can be persuaded, cajoled, even bribed to embrace a more compassionate capitalism, to save capitalism from 'devouring itself' (p132).

Let's really hear it for Karl Marx

In opting for the dominance of culture over 'economics', the authors are aware that they are in direct conflict with Marx's understanding of capitalism – a standpoint which has little difficulty in explaining the main features of the global economy in 1990s. In a chapter 'Let's Hear It for Karl Marx: Inequality and Instability in the Market Order' they have to

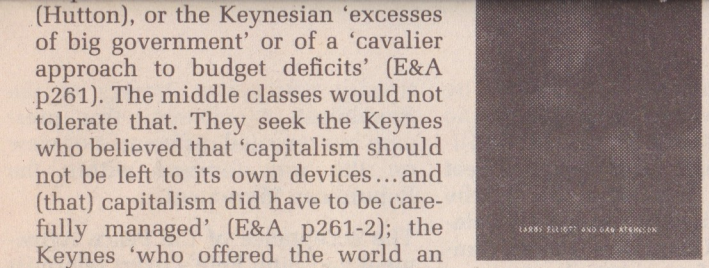
changing requirements of capital in that period. As we have argued, the post-war boom came to an end, and state welfare came under attack, not due to cultural phenomena but because of a renewed crisis in the capital accumulation process as the rate of profit began to fall. Neo-liberalism gave ideological expression to the new requirements of capital in this crisis-ridden period. Finally the desertion of the professional middle classes to Thatcher and the neo-liberal agenda happened because their privileged income and status could no longer be guaranteed within the state sector, and were increasingly distributed through the market – a materialist explanation based on class interests. Marxists, in fact, have little difficulty explaining all these features of the post-war period, unlike those who rely on 'cultural phenomena'.

Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, under a section 'Conservative, or Bourgeois Socialism', wrote of that 'part of the bourgeoisie (which) is

(Hutton), or the Keynesian 'excesses of big government' or of a 'cavalier approach to budget deficits' (E&A p261). The middle classes would not tolerate that. They seek the Keynes who believed that 'capitalism should not be left to its own devices... and (that) capitalism did have to be carefully managed' (E&A p261-2); the Keynes 'who offered the world an unparalleled period of prosperity' (Hutton); who believed in putting 'severe restrictions on the mobility of capital' (E&A p262) and whose programme today 'would entail a transformation of the way the financial system worked' (Hutton). They seek the 'authentic' Keynes, untarnished by the failure of Keynesianism in the crisis of the 1970s.

Both books argue that a successful capitalism requires a flourishing middle class and both are therefore concerned with promoting its interests. Hutton argues concretely that they will break with neo-liberalism only if they are given a vested interest in the system by 'incorporating inequality into the public domain'. E&A, more idealistically, appear to have written their book primarily to convince the middle classes of the error of their ways in accepting the free-market 'culture', by demonstrating, among other things, that they were much better off in the post-war Keynesian economy than under today's authoritarian, unstable and threatening free-market capitalism (p128-9).

After all this, the obvious similarities end. While Hutton's book offers a structured and well thought out defence of middle class interests with concrete policies to achieve that end, *The Age of Insecurity* is full of lazy generalisations and simplifications in reaching a different, if equally reactionary and utopian, standpoint to that of Hutton.[2] Both books put forward incredible policies to control a rampant, and non-productive financial capital, but while Hutton approves of the European Union and the so-called 'independence' of the Bank of England, Elliott and Atkinson do not. Under the guise of being part of the tradition which 'deprecates imperialism, balance of power diplomacy and the construction of big, powerful political units',



in the rich western imperialist countries. So when two *Guardian* economic journalists write a book on the 'deep-rooted insecurity affecting our lives in an age of untrammelled finance', their primary concern is not with the working class. *The Age of Insecurity*[1] gives political expression to the anxiety of growing numbers of the commercial and professional middle class threatened with proletarianisation by the neo-liberal policies of Blair's Labour government.

DAVID YAFFE examines yet another attempt to forge a political economy of the new middle class.

It is precisely now that neo-liberalism 'has failed, even in its own terms, and left the global economy unstable and poised on the brink of a social and environmental chasm' , that this book and others like it are being written.

form. However, Elliott and Atkinson argue, his position is 'hugely irrelevant to Britain's real problems' (p218), because it ignores the key cultural factor behind the present crisis of 'social democracy' – the unquestioned acceptance of the free market economy.

Exactly what brought on this 'unquestioned acceptance of the free-market economy' is never clear. Although the final blow for the post-war system, for them, was the 'economic crisis which stemmed from the Yom Kippur war in the autumn of 1973', it seems the way people lived and spent their leisure time and how this madness. All this is necessary to avoid the obvious truth that the failure of Keynesianism was not a 'cultural phenomenon' but an economic one, arising from the contradictions within the capitalist system of production. The post-war boom came to an end because profits from production at home and trade and investment abroad, were insufficient both to give an adequate return on capital, and to finance state welfare and the growing unproductive private sector. It was no longer possible to guarantee the relatively privileged conditions of higher-paid workers and the middle classes through the state sector

ing of the political, social and cultural changes that we associate with Thatcherism.[3]

It is precisely now that neo-liberalism 'has failed, even in its own terms, and left the global economy unstable and poised on the brink of a social and environmental chasm' (p14), that this book and others like it are being written. The aim is to show that the system can be saved if only the middle classes can be persuaded, cajoled, even bribed to embrace a more compassionate capitalism, to save capitalism from 'devouring itself' (p132).

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Culture, politics and economics

Elliott and Atkinson argue that the rise of the free-market rightwing and the unquestioned acceptance of the free-market economy was a cultural phenomenon (p19). In this they say they are at one with Hutton and others on the centre-left in seeking an explanation which 'enthrones cultural above economic forces' (p194). Their disagreement with Hutton is that having started from the right place, 'the rottenness of the state', he then proceeded in the wrong direction. In seeing Britain's political and cultural institutions as responsible for the 'national malaise', he demands wholesale institutional reform. However, Elliott and Atkinson argue, his position is 'hugely irrelevant to Britain's real problems' (p218), because it ignores the key cultural factor behind the present crisis of 'social democracy' – the unquestioned acceptance of the free market economy.

Exactly what brought on this 'unquestioned acceptance of the free-market economy' is never clear. Although the final blow for the post-war system, for them, was the 'economic crisis which stemmed from the Yom Kippur war in the autumn of 1973', it seems the way people lived and spent their leisure time and how they perceived themselves, 'all lay behind the gradual erosion of the collectivist cement that held the West together in the era of Beveridge and the Beatles' (p17). Thatcher and Reagan therefore ran 'with the cultural grain, and were able to fashion a new consensus of their own from the fears of the middle classes and the aspirations of the blue-collar working class' (p17). In another place it is put down to a 'New Authenticity' rather than any mysterious outbreak of 'greed' or 'selfishness' (p75). That is, the search for the 'genuine article in many, perhaps most, areas of life' . In this context, they argue, an inflating currency is no more acceptable than chemical beer. 'The latter led to the Campaign for Real Ale, the former to the campaign for real money: – monetarism.' (p70) Later, explaining the move to close down subsidised workplaces such as British Leyland, they say that 'artificial jobs were no more acceptable than artificial bread.'(p74)

Reading this, it seems that it is our authors who have swallowed all the propaganda. But there is method in this madness. All this is necessary to avoid the obvious truth that the failure of Keynesianism was not a 'cultural phenomenon' but an economic one, arising from the contradictions within the capitalist system of production. The post-war boom came to an end because profits from production at home and trade and investment abroad, were insufficient both to give an adequate return on capital, and to finance state welfare and the growing unproductive private sector. It was no longer possible to guarantee the relatively privileged conditions of higher-paid workers and the middle classes through the state sector while sustaining adequate living standards for the mass of the working class.

As a result of the new conditions of capital stagnation and growing inter-imperialist rivalries in the middle of the 1970s, the social-democratic consensus began to break down. The 1974-79 Labour government set monetary targets and cut state spending in an effort to push up profitability. The low-paid state sector workers fought back and the 'winter of discontent', 1978/9, drove the higher paid skilled workers and the middle classes into the arms of the Tory Party. Thatcher embraced this new constituency and, as Hutton said in his book, 'the liberal professions, affluent council house tenants, homeowners, all benefited from her tax cuts, credit boom and privatisation programme.' They turned to Thatcher and embraced the market. For now it was the market which was delivering privileges which the state sector could no longer sustain. This is the materialist explanation that is the starting point for any understanding of the global economy in 1990s. In a chapter 'Let's Hear It for Karl Marx: Inequality and Instability in the Market Order' they have to acknowledge this, while dismissing its revolutionary political consequences. Capitalism, they accept, if left to its own devices is inherently unstable. In that Marx was correct. Marx was wrong, though, because he failed to predict how pliable capitalism in the developed industrial states would prove to be: 'far from passively waiting for the masses to turn the streets of Manchester, Berlin or New York into rivers of blood, the capitalist class made concessions, big concessions.' The proletariat, far from signing up for the class war in response to greater immiseration, became richer and more contented. Capitalism between the years of Marx's death in 1883 and the end of the post-war Golden Age in 1973 became, according to our authors, more humane. (p220-1)

This kind of lazy simplification runs throughout the book. It is not only wrong but obscene. Those 'rivers of blood' did flow: through two imperialist wars, fascism and the Great Depression, with millions upon millions of working class people losing their lives. After the second world war it wasn't 'unthinkable' that the pre-Depression status quo should be restored in countries like Britain (p262); it was politically impossible given the change in the balance of class forces resulting from those horrendous events. In addition, in case it has been forgotten, British prosperity and democracy after the war were built upon the backs of millions of oppressed peoples in the colonies. The authors need reminding that Attlee's Labour government might have 'presided over the high noon of British collectivism' (p25), but that it could do this only because it was virulently imperialist. Keynesianism was not responsible for the post-war boom, as the authors maintain, but gave ideological expression to the

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The dominant position of a rampant, non-productive financial capital in the 1990s is the inevitable consequence of the capitalist market economy in crisis. It cannot be changed by changing cultural values but by destroying the system of production on which it is based. Marx understood this and fought to build the working class movement which could help to bring it about. For Marxists the standpoint of *The Age of Insecurity* offers no solution but is itself part of the problem. ■

1. Larry Elliott and Dan Atkinson *The Age of Insecurity* Verso 1998 £17.00 hbk. All page numbers in the text, unless stated otherwise, refer to this book.

2.For a review of Hutton's book see David Yaffe, 'The political economy of the new middle class', FRFI 124 April/May 1995.

3. In is only in this context that one can see the real role of Blair's Labour government. See David Yaffe, 'The politics and economic of globalisation' in FRFI 137 June/July 1997. For a detailed materialist explanation of the end to the post-war boom see David Yaffe and Paul Bullock 'Inflation, the crisis and the post-war boom' in *Revolutionary Communist* 3/4 RCG Publications 1974.

INDONESIA into the vortex

A vortex of imploding debt is swallowing up entire economies and governments. Indonesia's financial crisis ignited the fires that burnt down Jakarta. The complacency with which capitalist commentators greeted last year's Asian currency and stock market falls – talk of necessary adjustments, temporary aberrations – has given way to grim mutterings of a global crash. They are right. TREVOR RAYNE describes the context of the Indonesian uprising.

'For miles the streets of Jakarta look like the set of a disaster film. Hundreds of shops, houses, public buildings, police stations, hotels, discos, shopping centres and markets were burnt.' Richard Lloyd Parry, The Independent, 15 May, 1998

Tanks and armoured cars criss-crossed the city, squadrons of troops on motorbikes raced around looking for targets, but the anger of the workers and the poor could not be suppressed. The official tally of the 15 May outpouring is 3,000 buildings destroyed, including 500 banks, 1,000 cars and 500 motorbikes, at a cost of $230 million. The National Commission on Human Rights say 1,188 people were killed.

So much for the New Tiger, for the air-conditioned shopping malls, skyscraper hotels and annual economic growth of 7-8%. The business community had fled to hotels overseas or went into hiding. Sweden's Ericson was closed. So were Total, Mobil, Deutsche Bank, Credit Suisse, First Boston, etc: staff had vanished. Of 50 main supermarket stores in Jakarta,

the world. The latest shocks to the world's financial system are just another stage in the countdown to capitalism's collapse.' [1]

Overaccumulation of capital manifests itself in the overproduction of commodities and speculative surges of money desperately seeking profits and avoiding losses. World demand for semi-conductors is contracting; petrochemical prices have dropped 20% since October 1997; oil prices have fallen; world demand for aircraft engines is down; overcapacity is rapidly becoming the concern in industry after industry. This is a global phenomenon; it has heightened expression in southeast Asia. Over 1996-97 the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and

is $80 billion. Of this, the credit rating agency Moody's described three quarters as bad. Banks with the biggest exposure to Indonesia are the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC – owner of Midland Bank) with $1.8 billion, Standard Chartered with $1.7 billion, Chase Manhattan $2.5 billion, Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi $3.7 billion, Fuji Bank $1.8 billion. There are also major exposures of French and German banks. Overall, HSBC and Standard Chartered's loans to Asia amount to 40% and 70% of all their loans respectively. Into this dilemma stepped the trouble-shooting International Monetary Fund (IMF).

At the end of last year the IMF put together a $43 billion bailout plan.

bad loans. Their overall lending to Asia is $271.4 billion, of which $44 billion is conceded as bad. They lent $23 billion to Indonesia. 61% of the increase in Japanese exports between 1985-95 went to Asia. Asia's share in Japanese exports rose from 19% in 1985 to 40% in 1995. These have fallen by a fifth in a year and the situation is worsening: exports to Indonesia halved in April alone. Mitsubishi made a loss for the year and cut investment by a third. Hitachi's earnings are down 35% and investment by a third; Nissan's 97%; NEC's 25%, and so on. Their credit worthiness is descending to junk status. Meanwhile, unemployment, at 4.1%, is at a post-war record level.

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ers are turning to crime to make ends meet.

...and the other Tigers

Malaysia saw fit to build the world's tallest building; it remains largely empty with no takers. Domestic loans equal 150% of the gross domestic product. A quarter are considered unpayable. Singapore's non-performing loans have tripled in a year to 10% of the total, and property prices are down a third as business demand evaporates. The Thai economy is shrinking and private investment has halved in a year.

Trade war threatens

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On 20 May US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright suggested that it might be wise if President Suharto, to keep his 'reputation intact', were to resign. On 21 May Suharto bade farewell to the position he had known for 32 years. Into his place stepped one of his most loyal cronies, a good friend of German Chancellor Kohl and General Electric chairman John Welch. New President Habibie's family network of companies only extends to some 80 firms, compared to Suharto's family's 1,247 companies. Suharto had to go or imperialism risked seeing the working class quickly form radical, independent organisations that would mount a sustained challenge to its operations in Indonesia.

A global issue

What happened in Indonesia has characteristics that are specific to that country's history, but it was triggered by the crisis that has swept the world. The latest shocks to the world's financial system are just another stage in the countdown to capitalism's collapse.' [1]

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Indonesia

Suharto took over the presidency in 1966 from Sukarno after the killing of over 500,000 people, many of them members of the biggest communist party in the world outside the socialist countries. The communist party was unarmed. Sukarno established an independent oil company, Petromina, and nationalised foreign oil assets. Suharto was blessed with US aid and multinational investment. Much of this investment had to be made in joint ventures with local is $80 billion. Of this, the credit rating agency Moody's described three quarters as bad. Banks with the biggest exposure to Indonesia are the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC – owner of Midland Bank) with $1.8 billion, Standard Chartered with $1.7 billion, Chase Manhattan $2.5 billion, Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi $3.7 billion, Fuji Bank $1.8 billion. There are also major exposures of French and German banks. Overall, HSBC and Standard Chartered's loans to Asia amount to 40% and 70% of all their loans respectively. Into this dilemma stepped the trouble-shooting International Monetary Fund (IMF).

At the end of last year the IMF put together a $43 billion bailout plan. Suharto's government consumed $4 billion of this before he fell. Suharto rejected IMF proposals that would undermine his family businesses: 'The IMF consists of a lot of Jews and that is how Israel influences the IMF' he opined. IMF money was stopped. On 4 May Suharto acceded to IMF demands to remove subsidies on fuel – the street protests and rebellion grew. Inflation is around 80%, the rupiah has lost 70% of its exchange rate value in a year, real wages have been halved, non-oil exports fell 60% in the last nine months of 1997 and unemployment grew rapidly. Under these conditions, not just the poorest are pushed into desperation, but also those whose aspirations were fuelled by the credits: all workers and the newly prosperous middle class.

Imperialism has bought itself a breathing space with Habibie. New loans are forthcoming, but debt was the problem to begin with. Under popular pressure many of the deals between multinationals and Suharto's company network were under threat of suspension. Thames Water, Rolls Royce, Rio Tinto, BP, United Biscuits, PowerGen, Taylor Woodrow, GEC Alsthom, British Aerospace and the Bank of Scotland are bad loans. Their overall lending to Asia is $271.4 billion, of which $44 billion is conceded as bad. They lent $23 billion to Indonesia. 61% of the increase in Japanese exports between 1985-95 went to Asia. Asia's share in Japanese exports rose from 19% in 1985 to 40% in 1995. These have fallen by a fifth in a year and the situation is worsening: exports to Indonesia halved in April alone. Mitsubishi made a loss for the year and cut investment by a third. Hitachi's earnings are down 35% and investment by a third; Nissan's 97%; NEC's 25%, and so on. Their credit worthiness is descending to junk status. Meanwhile, unemployment, at 4.1%, is at a post-war record level.

Japan accounts for 70% of the regional gross domestic product. It is Asia's main export market and imports into Japan are down 28% on the year. In 1995 Japan generated 60% of the world's net capital outflows. The USA absorbed 45% of the inflows. Japan financed the USA's 1980s arms build up and 1990s investment growth. Japan holds a quarter of the USA's foreign debt. If the Japanese economy declines any further, capital will be pulled out of the USA in such proportions that the vortex will engulf Wall Street and the City with it. Six officials from the Bank of Japan and the Japanese finance ministry have hanged themselves in the recent period. It is, as they say, an honourable thing to do.

South Korea

The world's eleventh biggest economy contracted for the first time in 18 years, shrinking 3.8% in the first quarter of 1998. Investment in machinery and equipment fell 41%. Bad debts are expected to grow from $50 billion to $90 billion by the end of the year. South Korea has $10 billion in loans to Indonesia. Half the major banks are considered non-viable in terms of assets held. In return for a $58 billion IMF-bailout ers are turning to crime to make ends meet.

...and the other Tigers

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Trade war threatens

'There is an invasion of foreign capital, especially US capital, underway. A type of colonisation of Asia has started.' The Secretary General of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

US and European companies are buying up Asian assets cheaply. At the same time tension is increasing over growing trade imbalances and the cost of trying to bail out the sinking economies. To try and stimulate domestic demand the Japanese government has pumped trillions of yen into the economy, to no avail. Instead, the increased money supply has devalued the yen to a seven-year low against the dollar. As Japanese firms try to export their way out of crisis, the USA recorded a record monthly trade deficit of $13 billion in March. The first quarter US trade deficit was $36.8 billion, 26% up on the corresponding 1997 deficit. Lost US sales to Asia are expected to total $100 billion this year. As the yen falls China is under pressure to devalue its currency to compete in US, European, and what remains of Asian markets. A series of competitive devaluations threatens Asia, triggering another wave of crashes.

Having spent $50 billion bailing out Mexico in 1995 and $100 billion

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A global issue

What happened in Indonesia has characteristics that are specific to that country's history, but it was triggered by a condition that is general to southeast Asia and is a structural problem for world capitalism. In December we said,

'The massive capital flows to southeast Asia, the easy credit that has financed the global stock market boom, the growing monopolisation of capital through mergers, acquisitions and privatisations, the unprecedented autonomy of the financial system from real production, and the growing rivalry between the major imperialist powers, have the same cause – an overaccumulation of capital in the heartlands of capitalism. The frenetic international expansion of capitalism – globalisation – has now spread that crisis to every part of industry after industry. This is a global phenomenon; it has heightened expression in southeast Asia. Over 1996-97 the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia saw a net reversal of flows of private funds of $109 billion, 10% of their combined gross domestic product. This money has poured into US and European stock markets. European stock markets are up 53% since the beginning of 1997. An index of Wall Street shares is up 150% on its 1994 level. This vast speculative balloon cannot inflate indefinitely while the productive base lags and even begins to shrink, a process which the Asian crisis is accelerating. The credit crunch that has smashed into the Tigers, is now upon the Japanese economy and confronts European and US markets with the prospect of meltdown.[2]

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Indonesia's private company debt stepped the trouble-shooting International Monetary Fund (IMF).

At the end of last year the IMF put together a $43 billion bailout plan. Suharto's government consumed $4 billion of this before he fell. Suharto rejected IMF proposals that would undermine his family businesses: 'The IMF consists of a lot of Jews and that is how Israel influences the IMF' he opined. IMF money was stopped. On 4 May Suharto acceded to IMF demands to remove subsidies on fuel – the street protests and rebellion grew. Inflation is around 80%, the rupiah has lost 70% of its exchange rate value in a year, real wages have been halved, non-oil exports fell 60% in the last nine months of 1997 and unemployment grew rapidly. Under these conditions, not just the poorest are pushed into desperation, but also those whose aspirations were fuelled by the credits: all workers and the newly prosperous middle class.

Imperialism has bought itself a breathing space with Habibie. New loans are forthcoming, but debt was the problem to begin with. Under popular pressure many of the deals between multinationals and Suharto's company network were under threat of suspension. Thames Water, Rolls Royce, Rio Tinto, BP, United Biscuits, PowerGen, Taylor Woodrow, GEC Alsthom, British Aerospace and the Bank of Scotland are among the British firms tied to the family businesses. Thames Water's contract was temporarily suspended, then restored, presumably after a suitable new palm was found to grease.

Japan

It is the deteriorating condition of the world's second biggest economy that most alarms capitalism's apologists. Moody's described Japanese banks as being in a state of slow motion collapse. Two years ago nine of the banks cited were in the world's top ten companies for assets held: Dai-Ichi Kangyo, Sumitomo, Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi etc. Together they have written off over $70 billion in worthiness is descending to junk status. Meanwhile, unemployment, at 4.1%, is at a post-war record level.

Japan accounts for 70% of the regional gross domestic product. It is Asia's main export market and imports into Japan are down 28% on the year. In 1995 Japan generated 60% of the world's net capital outflows. The USA absorbed 45% of the inflows. Japan financed the USA's 1980s arms build up and 1990s investment growth. Japan holds a quarter of the USA's foreign debt. If the Japanese economy declines any further, capital will be pulled out of the USA in such proportions that the vortex will engulf Wall Street and the City with it. Six officials from the Bank of Japan and the Japanese finance ministry have hanged themselves in the recent period. It is, as they say, an honourable thing to do.

South Korea

The world's eleventh biggest economy contracted for the first time in 18 years, shrinking 3.8% in the first quarter of 1998. Investment in machinery and equipment fell 41%. Bad debts are expected to grow from $50 billion to $90 billion by the end of the year. South Korea has $10 billion in loans to Indonesia. Half the major banks are considered non-viable in terms of assets held. In return for a $58 billion IMF-bailout the government agreed to end protection for the *chaebol* monopoly combines, open them up to western multinationals and end job protection. The stock market dropped 20% in four days in May on news that Hyundai was to sack a fifth of its 46,000 workers. Corporate bankruptcies have doubled in a year and unemployment has tripled. Workers are threatening a general strike in opposition to a new law making redundancies easier for firms.

Suicides are up 36% this year and a recent survey showed that over a quarter of South Koreans feel an urge to kill themselves. People are desperate: robberies in Seoul are up 45%, housewives and unemployed work-

Trade war threatens

'There is an invasion of foreign capital, especially US capital, underway. A type of colonisation of Asia has started.' The Secretary General of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

US and European companies are buying up Asian assets cheaply. At the same time tension is increasing over growing trade imbalances and the cost of trying to bail out the sinking economies. To try and stimulate domestic demand the Japanese government has pumped trillions of yen into the economy, to no avail. Instead, the increased money supply has devalued the yen to a seven-year low against the dollar. As Japanese firms try to export their way out of crisis, the USA recorded a record monthly trade deficit of $13 billion in March. The first quarter US trade deficit was $36.8 billion, 26% up on the corresponding 1997 deficit. Lost US sales to Asia are expected to total $100 billion this year. As the yen falls China is under pressure to devalue its currency to compete in US, European, and what remains of Asian markets. A series of competitive devaluations threatens Asia, triggering another wave of crashes.

Having spent $50 billion bailing out Mexico in 1995 and $100 billion so far in Asia, the IMF is running out of money. Voices are raised in US financial circles against giving the IMF any more. Triumphal capitalism is running out of credit. There is no economic power big enough to hold the global system together, no locomotive strong enough to haul the world economy back from the abyss. Pride goes before a fall. ■

1. David Yaffe, 'Countdown to Capitalism's Collapse', FRFI 140, December 1997/ January 1998.
2. See Trevor Rayne, 'Meltdown', FRFI 127, October/November 1995 and 'The 1929 Crash', FRFI 125, June/July 1995.

ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE

CUBA VIVE

Cuba's health service

The fight for life

In 1959 Cuba created a universal, comprehensive and free health care system. Despite nearly 40 years of the US blockade, which includes medicines and food, this system still exists. Cuba's health statistics are comparable to those of the wealthy Western countries: an infant mortality of 7.2 per 1,000 live births (half that of Washington DC) compared to 60 per 1,000 live births in 1959; life expectancy over 75 years (59 years in 1960) and a doctor-patient ratio of 1:176, the highest in the world. For a population of 11 million, Cuba has 15 medical schools, four dental schools, 284 hospitals, 440 polyclinics, 11 research institutes, 60,000 doctors and 75,000 nurses.

Primary and preventive care, including maternity units, the family doctor programme and community clinics, are matched by pioneering work in medical research. This includes development of vaccines for hepatitis B and meningococcal meningitis B, treatment for retinitis pigmentosa (which causes blindness), treatment for the skin condition vitiligo and research into a vaccine against HIV.

In May, Fidel Castro collected the better, prevented, at a cost which is sometimes no more than one dollar per person? How much is a human life worth?'

The UN estimates that the cost of universal access to basic health care is $25 billion per year – 3% of the $800 billion spent on military expenditure per year. These are the obscene priorities of imperialism.

The effects of a crippling blockade

For 40 years, Cuba has been proof that there is another way: that socialism can provide health for all, that be upheld even in wartime. The extension of the blockade in 1992 to ban US subsidiaries from trading with Cuba has been exacerbated by US/European pharmaceutical company mergers. Licenses for individual sales of medicines are difficult to apply for and rarely granted. Shipping restrictions reduce the delivery of medical equipment. Between 1993 and 1996, Cuba spent an extra $8.7m on shipping medical supplies from Asia, Europe and Latin America.

A major effect has been increased malnutrition in Cuba. Nutritional deficits amongst pregnant women

German company Braun but produced in the USA) which would allow repeated pain-free access. One ward visited was on its 22nd day without a basic medication to stop children vomiting after their cancer chemotherapy. The shortage of haemodialysis units for people with end-stage kidney disease meant that by the end of 1995, only 712 out of 1,094 people needing such treatment could obtain it.

World's children denied vaccine

The blockade also attempts to prevent Cuban health breakthroughs being made available to others. The vaccine for meningococcal meningitis B, a killer disease worldwide, is a case in point. There were 1,146 cases in Britain in 1995 and 2,293 cases in 1996. One in 10 people die; one in 13 suffer severe and long-lasting side effects. However, the Cuban vaccine has met with a wall of silence. Since 1991, the vaccine has been an effective part of routine childhood immunisations in Cuba. Yet public health laboratories in Britain argue that there is no proof that the Cuban vac-

US tries to extradite Assata Shakur

As a member of the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and 1970s, Assata Shakur was targeted by the FBI under its counter-intelligence programme, COINTELPRO, framed for the murder of a New Jersey State Trooper and sentenced to life imprisonment. In 1979 she escaped and since 1985 has been in political exile in Cuba.

In December 1997, New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman wrote to Pope John Paul II before his visit to Cuba asking him to press the Cuban government for Assata Shakur's extradition back to the US. The New Jersey officials have gone to great lengths to publicise their request and have even offered a bounty of $25,000. Whitman describes Assata Shakur as New Jersey's 'most wanted fugitive' and claims that her return to the US would be part of the 'normalisation of relations' between the two countries.

In a letter to the Pope, Assata Shakur described the New Jersey request as 'unprecedented in history…Why, I wonder, do I warrant such attention? What do I represent that is such a threat?' She herself provides the answer:

'They are very much interested in wiping out any symbol of resistance to the status quo. And I represent someone who has dedicated her life to the liberation of my people. Black people are still oppressed and exploited. So I still struggle against the

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In May, Fidel Castro collected the Health for All Award from the World Health Organisation (WHO): Cuba is the only country to have already met all the health indicators recommended by the WHO for all countries by the year 2000.

Imperialism's death sentence

Cuba's health record is impressive by any standards, but even more so in the context of a world decimated by the poverty and disease imposed by imperialism. Addressing the WHO, Castro described the stark reality:

'The world economy grew six-fold and the production of wealth and services grew from less than $5 trillion to more than $29 trillion between 1950 and 1997. Why then is it still the case that each year, 12 million children, prevented, at a cost which is sometimes no more than one dollar per person? How much is a human life worth?'

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President Castro arrives in Geneva for the 50th anniversary of WHO

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A major effect has been increased malnutrition in Cuba. Nutritional deficits amongst pregnant women have led to an increasing number of low-birthweight babies. Between 1989 and 1993, the daily calorific intake dropped by 33%. The daily litre of milk that was assured to all children up to the age of 13 is now available only up to six years old. Water quality has deteriorated due to limited supplies of water treatment chemicals and spare parts, resulting in a rise in water-borne diseases such as typhoid fever, dysentery, hepatitis A, and an increasing mortality rate from acute diarrhoeal diseases. In 1991, 1,297 medications were available in

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The choice for humanity remains as ever one between the barbarism of imperialism and the hope socialism offers. Fidel Castro asked 'Who can save our species? The blind, uncontrollable law of the market? Neoliberal globalisation, alone and for its own sake, like a cancer which

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'I have advocated and still advocate revolutionary changes in the structure and in the principles that govern the US. I advocate an end to capitalist exploitation, the abolition of racist policies, the eradication of sexism and the elimination of political repression. If that is a crime then I am totally guilty.'

Further, she wrote an 'open letter' to be circulated by any means possible. She states that New Jersey Governor Whitman, like Torricelli and other opportunistic politicians in New Jersey, came to power as lobbyists for the Batista faction, soliciting votes from right-wing Cubans and that far from 'normalising' relations between the US and Cuba, her situation is being manipulated as an excuse for continuing the illegal blockade: 'Cubans

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In 1997 the American Association for World Health concluded, in a report on the impact of the blockade, that 'the US blockade has dramatically harmed the health and nutrition of large numbers of ordinary Cuban citizens'. A humanitarian catastrophe has been averted only because Cuba has diverted resources to maintain and increase primary and preventive health care for all. Between 1989 and 1996, while its national budget remained static, public health outlays rose by 30.4%.

The blockade contravenes the Geneva Convention, which states that the free flow of food and medicine to the civilian population must have led to an increasing number of low-birthweight babies. Between 1989 and 1993, the daily calorific intake dropped by 33%. The daily litre of milk that was assured to all children up to the age of 13 is now available only up to six years old. Water quality has deteriorated due to limited supplies of water treatment chemicals and spare parts, resulting in a rise in water-borne diseases such as typhoid fever, dysentery, hepatitis A, and an increasing mortality rate from acute diarrhoeal diseases. In 1991, 1,297 medications were available in Cuba. In 1997 only 899 of these were available. Cuba has access to less than 50% of new medicines since most are developed by US pharmaceutical companies. Many routine medical supplies are unavailable.

Shortages of medical supplies create needless suffering as, for example, children with cancer have needles repeatedly stuck into them to access veins for chemotherapy as there are no cell site ports (made by tive part of routine childhood immunisations in Cuba. Yet public health laboratories in Britain argue that there is no proof that the Cuban vaccine can be used against the different strains in Britain. This is deliberate misinformation – Cuban research shows that the vaccine *does* protect against all strains. Professor Levin from St Mary's Hospital in London is currently coordinating a study in Cuba to confirm this. The lack of any serious research into the vaccine prior to this is part of the propaganda war against Cuba – and the greed of pharmaceutical companies whose main interest in drugs is profits.

The choice for humanity remains as ever one between the barbarism of imperialism and the hope socialism offers. Fidel Castro asked 'Who can save our species? The blind, uncontrollable law of the market? Neoliberal globalisation, alone and for its own sake, like a cancer which devours human beings and destroys nature? That cannot be the way forward...Cuba has fulfilled the WHO Health for All programme for the year 2000 since 1983, in spite of the cruel blockade it has suffered for almost 40 years, in spite of being a poor, Third World country. The attempt to commit genocide against our country has only made us redouble our efforts...The world can also fight and win.'

Hannah Caller

Cuba notes

Human rights victory

21 April marked a significant victory for Cuba against the US. The anti-Cuba resolution on human rights, annually presented to the Human Rights Commission in Geneva by the United States, was defeated by 19 votes to 16, with 18 abstentions. For seven years this resolution has accused Cuba of human rights violations and created a special rapporteur – who has always based his reports on documents supplied by the US State Department and anti-Cuba organisations in the US. This year, the US's bullying and blackmailing tactics have been defeated as the oppressed nations of the Caribbean, Latin America and Africa have rallied to defend Cuba – a fact reflected in Cuba's rapidly increasing diplomatic links in those regions. As Fidel Castro said, 'The support we received from Third World countries is closely linked to the fact that this country has defended the causes of the poorest people with actions, not words.'

EU/US Helms-Burton Accord in jeopardy

The Accord reached by the European Union with the United States, to avoid sanctions being imposed on European companies that 'traffic' with Cuba, is being challenged in the US Congress by arch-reactionary Jesse Helms and others.

The Accord asked President Clinton to seek from Congress a relaxation of Title IV of the Helms-Burton Act, which penalises third parties who invest in Cuban expropriated property. In exchange, European countries would be expected to work to 'dissuade' companies from investing in Cuba by withdrawing subsidies and tax concessions. British Prime Minister Tony Blair was instrumental in achieving this Accord.

The blockade would have remained in force, and the Accord found no favour with Cuba. In any case, as Cuba's National Assembly President, Ricardo Alarcon commented at the time, 'It is absurd to think an agreement can be reached simply through a US presidential promise to consult with the barbarians in Congress.'

And so it has proved. Newt Gingrich, House Speaker, has also indicated he will not support any amendment to the Helms-Burton law.

Cat Wiener

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Assata Shakur remains the sworn enemy of injustice and racism, and that is why she is seen as a symbol of resistance. In her 'open letter' she details the realities of life in the US for those who are poor and black: they have no freedom of speech, no freedom of expression and very little freedom of the press. She ends by appealing to 'those of you in the Black media, those of you in the progressive media, those of you who believe in truth freedom, to publish this statement and to let people know what is happening...you must be the voice of the voiceless.'

She calls on the young generation to carry forward the struggle: 'Young people need to become aware, to become conscious, to become active and multiply! Create a situation where there are just too many people saying "No!" to what's going on; saying, "We want another political reality, and we're not going to be silent or imprisoned."'

Susan Rose

For a copy of Assata Shakur's open letter contact Rock Around the Blockade (address on page 14). Also see 'Interview with Assata Shakur' FRFI 131.

The cheapening of education

New Labour's election manifesto promised education would be the new government's 'number one priority'. It is true that for an elite minority some forms of education can be individually liberating, enabling people to further develop abilities to critically analyse and engage with the world. Education can broaden personal horizons and imbue one with a sense of the universal. Unfortunately, it is not the case that we are currently being encouraged to indulge in a mass bout of self-fulfilment by an enlightened bourgeoisie. ANDREW DAVIES reports on the reality of New Labour so-called commitment to education.

It is important to be clear about the function of education under capitalism. State education was established to 'provide bourgeois facts and theories to counter "revolutionary" facts and theories promoted by the working-class; provide a moral and religious code which, once it had been taught to the working-class would change their behaviour; create a disciplined and punctual work force; create a national hierarchy based on education which would recreate and legitimate class differences'. (*The Deviant Pupil*, VJ Furlong, 1985)

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is widely acknowledged as one of the most original Marxist theorists of the twentieth century. Gramsci developed a theory he referred to as 'hegemony', a useful concept to employ when analysing ways in which certain groups maintain political, economic and ideological dominance. For Gramsci, social authority is established by presenting the values of the ruling class as the 'official' view of the world, apparently in the interests of everyone. This form of ideological control cannot be achieved by force, it requires the 'consent' of the mass of the people; once achieved it acts as a powerful form of social control. Gramsci sees the institutions of 'civil society', such as the

sures learning in a tick-box manner in which tasks are broken down into 'competencies'.

The reasoning behind the new vocationalism is that courses should be relevant to the *real world*. However, in the real world of the British labour market many university graduates are now forced to take the kind of jobs their parents' generation could have expected to get with a few decent 'O' levels. Given the depressed state of the economy, it is not surprising that the idea of vocational training has become so firmly established. However, it is important to understand that these new, meaningless qualifications do not create jobs. Due to the decline of the old manufacturing industries, the trend within the depressed labour market is towards unskilled and de-skilled work. We must reject the NVQ culture and put the boot into the idea that unemployment can be reduced simply by getting us all on courses.

Qualification inflation

The 16-member National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Sir Ron (now Lord) Dearing, was established in May 1996, with all-party support, to take higher education off the political agenda until after the general elec-

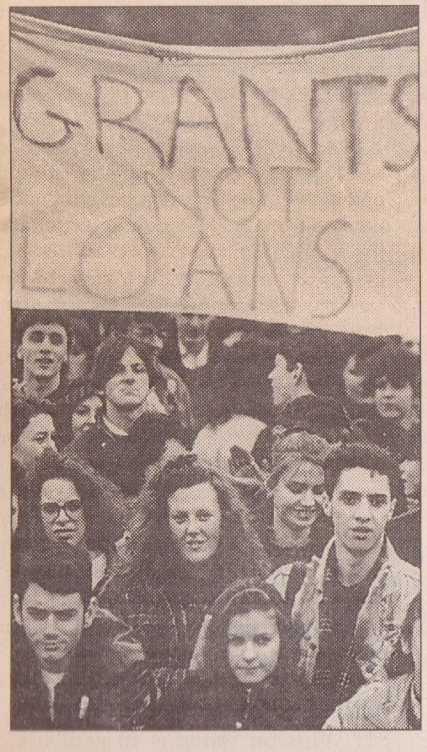
a significant increase in casualisation. Many colleges now deliver core work on the basis of part-time, agency and temporary contracts (*The Guardian*, 30 March 1998). In a significant number of colleges the part-time, hourly paid workforce has been dismissed and re-hired as 'self-employed' staff through outside agencies. Research by the lecturers' union, NATFHE, shows that four out of ten lecturers were on temporary contracts in 1994-95. Yet the salaries of college principals rose consistently post-incorporation, the average increase being 11.6 per cent by March 1995 (*Times Educational Supplement*, 27 March 1998).

The erosion of the status of the lecturing profession is a clear example of the inevitable proletarianisation of privileged sections of the working-class. As the crisis progresses lecturers will be forced to take sides in the class struggle. Will they follow the lead of the bourgeois trade unions in order to defend their remaining privileges, or will they throw in their lot with their working-class students?

Casual lecturers

As state funding to further and higher education has shrunk, and colleges and universities have been forced to turn to new commercial, industrial, European Union and research council sources of funding, the basis on which each sector employs lecturers has changed. In September 1995 a new company, Education Lecturing Services (ELS), started offering colleges a subcontracted lecturing service. ELS was recognised as the approved supplier by the Association of Colleges (AoC), the body that represents the interests of management. It should be no surprise that ELS was recognised by the AoC as Roger Ward, the former chief executive of the AoC, is also a director of ELS. Roger Ward was eventually forced out of his cushy job with the AoC because his connection with ELS made his position untenable. Despite being criticised for paying teachers below the appropriate hourly rate ELS now has in excess of 40,000

and engage with the world. Education can broaden personal horizons and imbue one with a sense of the universal. Unfortunately, it is not the case that we are currently being encouraged to indulge in a mass bout of self-fulfilment by an enlightened bourgeoisie. ANDREW DAVIES reports on the reality of New Labour so-called commitment to education.



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A tyranny of training

So, under capitalism state education is about ideological control of the working class. The main issues to be addressed are the political and economic circumstances that have led to a *tyranny of training* as a response to the crisis. Clearly, under the prevailing economic conditions it is necessary for the ruling class to foster ideological control by means of an intensification of constant vocational training. Not only does this shift sures learning in a tick-box manner in which tasks are broken down into 'competencies'.

The reasoning behind the new vocationalism is that courses should be relevant to the *real world*. However, in the real world of the British labour market many university graduates are now forced to take the kind of jobs their parents' generation could have expected to get with a few decent 'O' levels. Given the depressed state of the economy, it is not surprising that the idea of vocational training has become so firmly established. However, it is important to understand that these new, meaningless qualifications do not create jobs. Due to the decline of the old manufacturing industries, the trend within the depressed labour market is towards unskilled and de-skilled work. We must reject the NVQ culture and put the boot into the idea that unemployment can be reduced simply by getting us all on courses.

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The 16-member National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Sir Ron (now Lord) Dearing, was established in May 1996, with all-party support, to take higher education off the political agenda until after the general election. What is generally referred to as the Dearing Report was published in July 1997. The main reason for the report was the funding crisis that faced, and still faces, higher education institutions. In the university sector full-time student numbers increased by almost 70 per cent between 1989 and 1995. However, there has not been a similar increase in resources. Over the last six years, public funding per student has been cut by 28 per cent (*NPC Newsletter*, August 1997).

The philosophy of the Dearing Report is shared by many of those involved in the development of the new universities and colleges. It calls for a society committed to learning throughout life and for the breaking down of barriers such as the vocational and academic divide. The aim of higher education should be, according to the committee, to sustain a learning society.

pointed out before in *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* (See Jim Craven's article 'Labour's education fails the test' FRFI 138), this is merely because he/she has the credentials to overtake another person in the dole queue. Increased qualifications do not address the reality that capital creates a reserve army of unemployed labour in order to keep the wage demands of those in jobs to a minimum.

The privatisation of further education

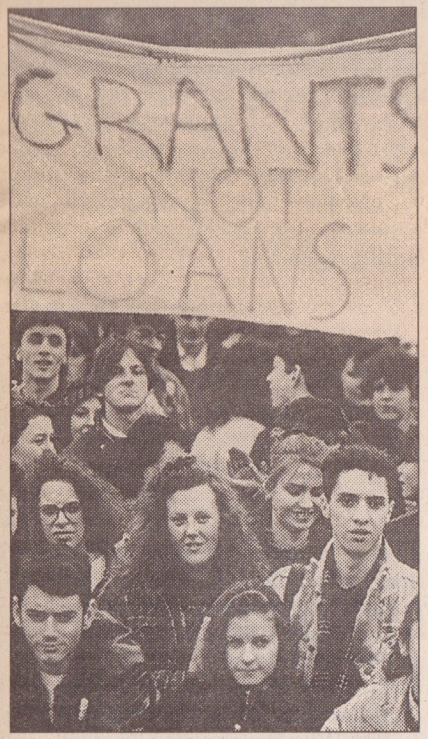
The lifelong learning revolution follows great upheavals in the further education sector. On April 1 1993, privileged sections of the working-class. As the crisis progresses lecturers will be forced to take sides in the class struggle. Will they follow the lead of the bourgeois trade unions in order to defend their remaining privileges, or will they throw in their lot with their working-class students?

Casual lecturers

As state funding to further and higher education has shrunk, and colleges and universities have been forced to turn to new commercial, industrial, European Union and research council sources of funding, the basis on which each sector employs lecturers has changed. In September 1995 a new company, Education Lecturing Services (ELS), started offering colleges a subcontracted lecturing service. ELS was recognised as the approved supplier by the Association of Colleges (AoC), the body that represents the interests of management. It should be no surprise that ELS was recognised by the AoC as Roger Ward, the former chief executive of the AoC, is also a director of ELS. Roger Ward was eventually forced out of his cushy job with the AoC because his connection with ELS made his position untenable. Despite being criticised for paying teachers below the appropriate hourly rate ELS now has in excess of 40,000 qualified staff on its books. ELS is currently testing a lecturer supply scheme at the University of Central England in Birmingham to ascertain the level of demand for its service within the university sector. These developments suggest that a crude process of privatisation in the university sector is now underway.

Pile 'em high and teach 'em cheap

Clearly, there will be a massive impact on the quality of higher education in these circumstances. Hourly-paid teachers are expected to prepare lectures in their own time. As dedicated as most teachers are, who is going to work hours and hours for nothing? Obviously, lecturers employed under these conditions feel no affinity with the institutions they work in, and this affects their attitude to students. Tutorial time for students is becoming a thing of the



ieved by force, it requires the 'consent' of the mass of the people; once achieved it acts as a powerful form of social control. Gramsci sees the institutions of 'civil society', such as the church, the school and the family, as fostering consent for dominant groups to maintain their ascendancy. As a Marxist, Gramsci understood that social conditions are not static, therefore, hegemony is never stable because power is never exercised permanently by the same alliance of 'class factions'. New situations require different compromises and alliances.

A tyranny of training

So, under capitalism state education is about ideological control of the working class. The main issues to be addressed are the political and economic circumstances that have led to a *tyranny of training* as a response to the crisis. Clearly, under the prevailing economic conditions it is necessary for the ruling class to foster ideological control by means of an intensification of constant vocational training. Not only does this shift responsibility for unemployment onto the individual, it reinforces the alliance of 'class factions' necessary to maintain hegemonic control.

The working class recognises the pointlessness of the endless cycle of training and retraining schemes. These measures condemn people to a revolving door of unemployment and low-paid, casualised temporary jobs under appalling conditions with no employment rights. However, the rise of vocational training ensures the real working class know their place, whilst reassuring the middle class and privileged sections of the working class living in fear of proletarianisation as living standards come under attack.

The rise of vocationalism

In 1986 the Tories established the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ), and subsequently the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). The NVQ meachaired by Sir Ron (now Lord) Dearing, was established in May 1996, with all-party support, to take higher education off the political agenda until after the general election. What is generally referred to as the Dearing Report was published in July 1997. The main reason for the report was the funding crisis that faced, and still faces, higher education institutions. In the university sector full-time student numbers increased by almost 70 per cent between 1989 and 1995. However, there has not been a similar increase in resources. Over the last six years, public funding per student has been cut by 28 per cent (*NPC Newsletter*, August 1997).

The philosophy of the Dearing Report is shared by many of those involved in the development of the new universities and colleges. It calls for a society committed to learning throughout life and for the breaking down of barriers such as the vocational and academic divide. The aim of higher education should be, according to the committee, to sustain a learning society.

These days, individuals' lack of qualifications is used by the government as an excuse for unemployment. If you are unemployed it is deemed to be your own fault for not taking the trouble to equip yourself with the skills required by the labour market. This is ironic as more than 30 per cent of 18 year olds now take 'A' levels; last year 34 per cent of school leavers went to university. There are currently a staggering four million adults on further education courses (*The Guardian*, 30 March 1998). The adult population has never been more highly qualified!

The term 'qualification inflation' is sometimes used to describe the trend towards ever increasing numbers of people gaining qualifications. However, qualification inflation does nothing to reduce the number of people without jobs. It is true that an individual can improve his/her employment prospects by gaining more qualifications. But, as we have

pointed out before in *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* (See Jim Craven's article 'Labour's education fails the test' FRFI 138), this is merely because he/she has the credentials to overtake another person in the dole queue. Increased qualifications do not address the reality that capital creates a reserve army of unemployed labour in order to keep the wage demands of those in jobs to a minimum.

The privatisation of further education

The lifelong learning revolution follows great upheavals in the further education sector. On April 1 1993, 450 colleges were removed from local authority control and established as independent companies. This change in the status of further education colleges is referred to as 'incorporation'. Colleges were forced to compete against each other for a finite pool of students.

The priority of each college these days is to maximise the number of bums on seats. An intruder discovered late at night on the premises of South Birmingham College was given a choice – enrol on a course or we call the police. He signed up for a pottery class and recently graduated with a fine art degree. The college coined a phrase for it: 'Intruders will be enrolled' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 27 March, 1998).

From the perspective of those unconnected with education it is reasonable to view lecturers as a relatively privileged group of workers. However, in common with the majority of workers they have experienced because his connection with ELS made his position untenable. Despite being criticised for paying teachers below the appropriate hourly rate ELS now has in excess of 40,000 qualified staff on its books. ELS is currently testing a lecturer supply scheme at the University of Central England in Birmingham to ascertain the level of demand for its service within the university sector. These developments suggest that a crude process of privatisation in the university sector is now underway.

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Clearly, there will be a massive impact on the quality of higher education in these circumstances. Hourly-paid teachers are expected to prepare lectures in their own time. As dedicated as most teachers are, who is going to work hours and hours for nothing? Obviously, lecturers employed under these conditions feel no affinity with the institutions they work in, and this affects their attitude to students. Tutorial time for students is becoming a thing of the past and the pastoral aspect of the tutor's role is rapidly disappearing. Higher education is increasingly geared towards treating students as consumers. The language of corporate management, profit and loss and customer relations is common currency amongst administrators. A 'pile 'em high and teach 'em cheap' philosophy prevails in much of the higher education sector. Supermarket style, modular, pick 'n' mix degrees are the norm in the ex-polytechnics. Meanwhile, the well-funded Oxbridge system remains intact for the privately-educated sons and daughters of the ruling elite.

The conditions for meaningful, purposeful, life-enhancing education for the majority of people, the working class, cannot be achieved under capitalism. We will continue to expose the lies behind the myth of 'education, education, education' and persist in the fight for *revolution, revolution, revolution!* ■

Susan Davidson reviews John Pilger's book *Hidden Agendas*

Behind the silence and the lies

Hidden Agendas, John Pilger. Vintage UK 1998 £8.99

Readers may know of John Pilger as a war correspondent from his time in Vietnam, as an author who has written about East Timor and as a filmmaker, whose latest documentary about post-apartheid South Africa was shown recently on British television. What Pilger is above all is a jobbing journalist and this book is a celebration of that role.

In *Hidden Agendas* he traces the rise of the military and financial institutions that increasingly dominate and control lives in vast areas of the world. He shows how concentrated ruling class power has become and how it uses a wide array of mechanisms, from culture to bombs, to maintain its control. At the same time he shows that the sycophancy and collusion of a wide swathe of professionals and middle-class people has allowed and encouraged this ever-increasing centralisation, not least British journalists and reporters from every part of the media.

It was the media that ignored or lied about what was happening in East Timor for years. Now, in the summer of 1998 it is common to hear ex-President Suharto of Indonesia described as a 'dictator'. Yet this repressive regime that carried out systematic genocide against the people of East Timor and oppressed West Papua for years was one of the biggest arms purchasers of British weaponry. Only days before the fall of Suharto, the Foreign Office said it would 'honour' all export licences and continued the lie that Hawk fighter planes were used only 'as the abuse of truth, the manipulation of language and the patronising talk of British interests – these are the targets of John Pilger's message.

A fortnight later, Cook's 'thorough review' of foreign policy concluded: 'It is not realistic or practical to revoke licences (for the export of arms) which were valid and in force at the time of our election'. Cook merely legitimised the continuation of the £700 million business of Procurement Services International selling arms to Suharto's Indonesia, which include Tactica riot control vehicles. The ban on the sales of electric-shock batons, leg-irons and other torture equipment, like the earlier ban on land mines announced by Cook, merely formalised existing agreements. As Pilger notes, 'No questions were allowed. And no journalists, to their shame, spoke up'.

Pilger describes a New Labour government that is carrying forward the Thatcherite agenda that has forced the restructure of manufacturing in Britain to the point where one in ten workers in this sector are in arms production. Securing the profitability of the arms industry increasingly dictates foreign policy. The new Defence Secretary George Robertson is enthusiastic about the Eurofighter aircraft, costing £42 billion by 1997, and the Trident missile system, costing even more. Both were originally designed to prosecute war against the Soviet Bloc. Their continued production, at massive public cost, is justified by an elaborate politics of misinformation aimed at sustaining big business interests. The lies and distortions that justify continued and expanding military the shock troops of the imperial powers, the United States, Japan and Europe and their web of clubs, notably the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). Behind the talk of 'free trade' is the hidden agenda of 180 multinational corporations with half the world's business between them. Among their products are agribusiness, transport, arms, petro-chemicals and the media that includes terrestrial and celestial television and information technology.

Pilger describes the devastating effects of deregulation, casualisation and outsourcing on working conditions throughout the world as the needs of the multinationals are serviced at the expense of the working class and increasing millions of landless peasants. But above all he shows how the intellectuals, teachers, professionals and media workers have eased the path for the dominant right-wing authoritarian politics that serve the interests of capital. They have been the spokespersons for the stooges of imperialism in Indonesia and Burma, they have produced the propaganda against the nationalist Irish struggle and Arthur Scargill and the miners' strike, they have chorused disapproval of single mothers and the poor children of the estates. Well paid for their services, politicians, local councillors, head teachers and, above all, the journalists of both the popular and up-market press and television have served the press barons, notably Murdoch in a sustained attack. A culture of indiment that in 1965 aided in the slaughter of over half a million Indonesians, many of them communists, and helped put 'dictator' Suharto in power. And it was Labour Foreign Secretary David Owen who first sold the Hawk fighter bombers to Suharto in 1978 knowing that they would be used against the East Timorese people. The seductive profitability of the arms industry and the suppression of communism have long determined British policy. What has changed over the last thirty years is that the pace at which the imperialist powers are dividing up and using the world's resources is speeding up. Most significantly, the buying off and silencing of opposition and independent criticism has become one of the most urgent of the hidden agendas of the ruling class.

In *Hidden Agendas* Pilger uses the term 'investigative journalism' only when describing the brief period of the best of the *Sunday Times* and *Daily Mirror* reporting. Implied in his book is a powerful plea for the role and dignity of the media and the independence of the reporter. All journalism should be investigative journalism, Pilger suggests, otherwise the journalist is dancing to the hidden agenda of the ruling class. The job is to enquire relentlessly, to refuse to be fobbed off with dazzling displays and presentations, to probe the significance of statements, to press for the real meaning behind the hype. This is journalism as practised by John Pilger and a few others over the last thirty years or so. One 'hidden agenda' of the ruling class is to destroy such journalism. We urge readers of FREI to read this book.

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There is no aspect of economic, social or political life that is not dominated by the interests of the ruling power elite, the 'private tyrannies' of the multinational corporations, as Noam Chomsky calls them. These are the shock troops of the imperial powers, the United States, Japan and Europe and their web of clubs, notably the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). Behind the talk of 'free trade' is the hidden agenda of 180 multinational corporations with half the world's business between them. Among their products are agribusiness, transport, arms, petro-chemicals and the media that includes terrestrial and celestial television and information technology.

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So what is new in all this? After all, it was Wilson's Labour government that in 1965 aided in the slaughter of over half a million Indonesians, many of them communists, and helped put 'dictator' Suharto in power. And it was Labour Foreign Secretary David Owen who first sold the Hawk fighter bombers to Suharto in 1978 knowing that they would be used against the East Timorese people. The seductive profitability of the arms industry and the suppression of communism have long determined British policy. What has changed over the last thirty years is that the pace at which the imperialist powers are dividing up and using the world's resources is speeding up. Most significantly, the buying off and silencing of opposition and independent criticism has become one of the most urgent of the hidden agendas of the ruling class.

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Susan Davidson

Alexa Byrne reviews

Free Winston Silcott!

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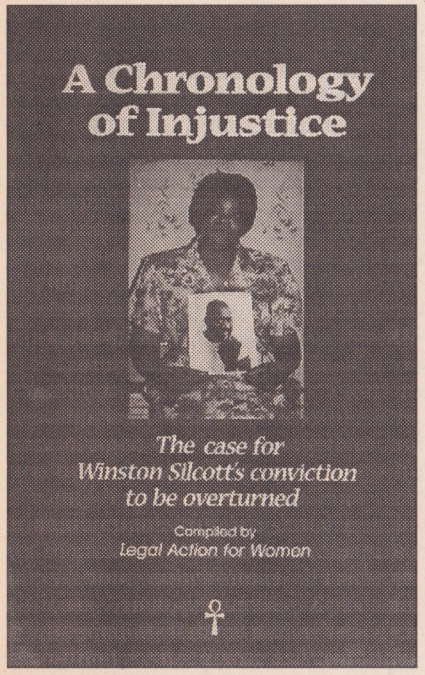
A Chronology of Injustice – the case for Winston Silcott's conviction to be overturned

Free Winston Silcott!


A Chronology of Injustice
The case for Winston Silcott's conviction to be overturned
Compiled by Legal Action for Women

■ **A Chronology of Injustice – the case for Winston Silcott's conviction to be overturned**
Compiled by Legal Action for Women, Crossroads Women's Centre, 230a Kentish Town Rd, London NW5 2AB. Tel 0171 482 2496

This booklet details the framing of Winston Silcott by a racist police force, judiciary and media, locating the vindictive brutality thrown at Winston and his family in the context of the oppression of black, working class communities in racist Britain.

The background to the 1985 Broadwater Farm uprising is detailed: the risings of the early 1980s against aggressive, racist policing; the appointment as Metropolitan Commissioner of Sir Kenneth Newman, fresh from torturing Nationalists in the north of Ireland. It was he who established 'symbolic locations' – working class, black communities – where any notion of community policing was replaced by policing by force. On 28 September 1985 in Brixton (a 'symbolic location'), Cherry Groce was shot and paralysed during a police raid. The black community took to the streets in protest and the officer responsible was suspended. A week later Cynthia Jarrett was assaulted by a Detective Constable Randall, again during a brutal and illegal raid on her home at Broadwater Farm, and suffered a fatal heart attack. Randall was not disciplined and again the community attempted to publicly protest. Police barricaded the exits of the estate and, in the battle which ensued, PC Blakelock was killed.

A campaign of terror against the people of Broadwater Farm followed, including the torture of minors in police cells, to get convictions. Their prime target was Winston Silcott. For years they had been trying to pin something serious on him. 'From the age of 14', Mary Silcott relates, 'the police started on Winston. Just riding a bike without lights, and they took him to court... They told me that if a pin dropped anywhere in Tottenham, they're coming for him and they're going to lock him away for life or send him to the madhouse'

Winston was a founding member of the Broadwater Farm Youth Association, set up in 1981 to challenge police brutality. Winston states that the police 'used to swarm over Broadwater Farm and do what they wanted. When the Youth Association was organised... people started standing together and complained if something was wrong'. The Youth Association also addressed the poverty and terrible living conditions faced by residents, uniting the different communities. The police branded Winston 'a troublemaker'.

The divisive, racist role of the British press is given close attention. The Estate was frequently described as a 'jungle', where 'if you are poor and white... it is a vicious and frightening prison'. This despite the gains of the Youth Association and the fact that 25% of those charged after Blakelock's death were white. The booklet reminds us of the vitriolic, racist terms used to describe Winston in particular, and shows how police and media collaboration is helping keep him in prison today.

In 1991 Mark Braithwaite, Engin Raghip and Winston were cleared on appeal of the murder of PC Blakelock. The others were freed, but Winston remained in prison as a result of a wrongful conviction for the murder of Anthony Smith in Hackney in 1984. This second charge was crucial to the police in nailing Winston, the conviction for Smith's death 'helping to ensure that the Blakelock trial was prejudiced from the start.'

The appalling negligence of Winston's solicitors in the Smith case, Antony Steel & Co, is exposed. A vital statement made by Winston, which showed that he was acting in self-defence, was lost. His case was prepared by 'an unqualified legal clerk', and his solicitor and barrister 'suppressed evidence, turned down witnesses who corroborated [Winston's] initial instructions, and advised him to lie at the trial'. Winston's current lawyer Adrian Clarke says: 'If the evidence now available had been put forward at the original trial it is difficult to see how Winston Silcott could ever have been convicted.'

But Winston remains in gaol not because he is guilty but, as the booklet states, because he and other framed or wrongly convicted prisoners like him are hostages of the racist state. A victory for Winston would 'send a message to those in authority that Black as well as other working class communities aren't prepared to be criminalised, cheated, excluded or physically attacked'. In August 1994 a Scotland Yard source said of Winston, 'He is an animal. I don't care if he is guilty or not. You should be glad he's in jail for the sake of your mother and your sisters.' The Home Office dragged its heels when asked to refer the case to the Court of Appeal, and even when threatened with court action, then Home Secretary Michael Howard still refused to refer the case.

But Winston Silcott is a fighter and the campaign continues. This publication will undoubtedly bring Winston's case to increased public attention and help to clear his name and win his freedom.

Alexa Byrne

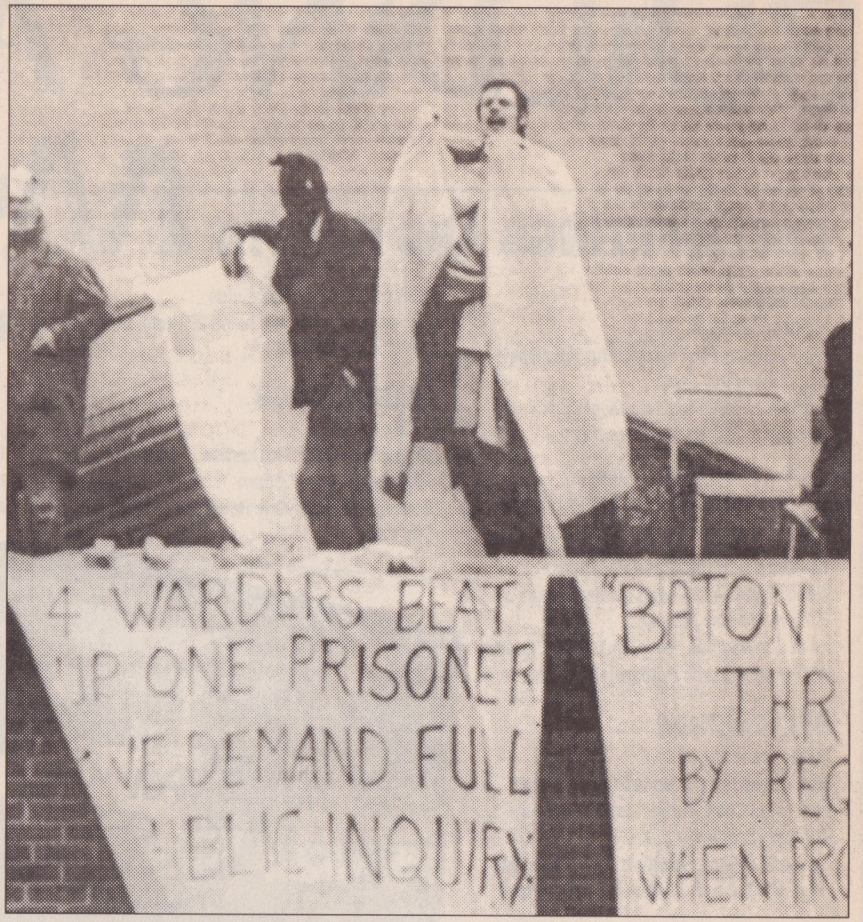
Full Sutton: a little local difficulty

In April this year Full Sutton maximum security prison in York experienced what the Prison Service described as a 'serious disturbance'. Obviously keen to play down the extent of the incident, it added that the disturbance had been 'low scale', as opposed to the 'wide scale' one which rocked the same prison in February last year. In fact, the more recent 'disturbance', although confined to just one wing of the prison and involving fewer prisoners than the February 1997 uprising, contained a significant factor which the Prison Service will have found worrying – the readiness of prisoners to physically resist attempts by riot squads to regain control.

The 1997 Full Sutton uprising was, like numerous previous 'disturbances' at the same gaol, largely a wrecking spree, intended to inflict structural damage upon the wings and render them uninhabitable. No attempts were made to engage prison staff in direct physical confrontation or resist attempts by Control and Restraint teams to seize back control of the institution once the prisoners' rage and energy was spent. The cost of such actions were measured in financial terms and temporary inconvenience to prison routine, allowing the prison authorities to persuasively argue that the protests were essentially acts of mindless vandalism which justified a further tightening up of the regime. Prior to April 1997, prisoners and staff engaged in an almost choreographed spectacle of conflict involving little or no bodily contact or injury, simply the constant destruction and repair of inanimate structures. It had become an intrinsic part of this well-scripted drama that

implications for future unrest at the gaol. The Prison Service must surely realise that the price of increasingly oppressive regimes will be protests and demonstrations which no longer follow the once predictable pattern of prisoners destroying property before surrendering to the riot squads. When everything is taken away from prisoners, including their dignity and sense of self-worth, when they are reduced to a condition where they no longer have anything left to lose, then they will revolt to the point of open violence and beyond. If this basic lesson is not learned by the prison system, the future consequences are truly apocalyptic. The plain truth is that prisoners at Full Sutton, in particular, have been pushed to the limit and are now beginning to push back. The cycle of repression and resistance is becoming inexorably more vicious and direct. The suspicion is that there exists an administrative intention to sustain the momentum of that con-

Scottish prisons had a notorious reputation for austere and punitive regimes, and disaffection was dealt with by straightforward violence and psychological brutality; the 'cages' of Inverness symbolised the response of the Scottish prison authorities to 'unmanageable' prisoners. Although the beginnings of a different way of dealing with 'difficult' prisoners were apparent in the creation of the Barlinnie Special Unit in the mid-1970s, the more universal experience of Scottish prisoners was one of unyielding regimes and a staff quick to respond to dissent with overwhelming force. In 1987 Scottish prisons became engulfed in some of the most violent rebellions in British penal history, characterised by hostage-taking and a willingness by prisoners to battle it out with riot squads and physically resist all attempts to subdue them. As the casualty toll for the uprisings increased it became apparent that it was only a matter of time before prison staff sus-



Prisoners' Solicitors Firm

In the last issue of FRFI I raised the issue of Continuous Assessment. This resulted in various prisoners writing to me. One letter in particular, from Frank Birley, a prisoner languishing in segregation/isolation, fired me with renewed hope.

Prisoners are entitled by law to many fundamental rights but these fail to be adhered to as the people who administer institutions are cal-

is irrelevant. The relevant factor is that we are prepared to suffer for what we believe in: humanitarian conditions and the restoration of rights which have been brutally stripped from us over the previous five years in particular.

The PSF will need as much help as possible and prisoners will be urged to help fund it. This firm will aim to tackle such subjects as racism

opposed to the 'wide scale' one which rocked the same prison in February last year. In fact, the more recent 'disturbance', although confined to just one wing of the prison and involving fewer prisoners than the February 1997 uprising, contained a significant factor which the Prison Service will have found worrying – the readiness of prisoners to physically resist attempts by riot squads to regain control.

The 1997 Full Sutton uprising was, like numerous previous 'disturbances' at the same gaol, largely a wrecking spree, intended to inflict structural damage upon the wings and render them uninhabitable. No attempts were made to engage prison staff in direct physical confrontation or resist attempts by Control and Restraint teams to seize back control of the institution once the prisoners' rage and energy was spent. The cost of such actions were measured in financial terms and temporary inconvenience to prison routine, allowing the prison authorities to persuasively argue that the protests were essentially acts of mindless vandalism which justified a further tightening up of the regime. Prior to April 1997, prisoners and staff engaged in an almost choreographed spectacle of conflict involving little or no bodily contact or injury, simply the constant destruction and repair of inanimate structures. It had become an intrinsic part of this well-scripted drama that as soon as the riot squads arrived, prisoners would abandon their protest and melt away in passive surrender. The prisoners considered there was little to gain and much to lose by being identified as aggressive ringleaders and inviting serious legal retribution and increased prison sentences. Disengaging at the point of direct physical confrontation ensured a greater chance of escaping prosecution. There was also the tactical disadvantage inherent in a struggle fought out in a confined space against well- trained riot squads able to call on an inexhaustible supply of manpower and equipment. This inevitably tipped the psychological balance of power firmly to the advantage of prison staff, who came to believe that no matter how prolonged the 'disturbance' and no matter how extensive the damage, control would always be restored with the minimum of physical injury.

implications for future unrest at the gaol. The Prison Service must surely realise that the price of increasingly oppressive regimes will be protests and demonstrations which no longer follow the once predictable pattern of prisoners destroying property before surrendering to the riot squads. When everything is taken away from prisoners, including their dignity and sense of self-worth, when they are reduced to a condition where they no longer have anything left to lose, then they will revolt to the point of open violence and beyond. If this basic lesson is not learned by the prison system, the future consequences are truly apocalyptic. The plain truth is that prisoners at Full Sutton, in particular, have been pushed to the limit and are now beginning to push back. The cycle of repression and resistance is becoming inexorably more vicious and direct. The suspicion is that there exists an administrative intention to sustain the momentum of that conflict until a sufficiently 'serious disturbance' provides the necessary justification to lock down the gaol completely and impose a Control Unit regime on its inmates. The evidence from the regime changes elsewhere in the maximum security system tends to support this view.

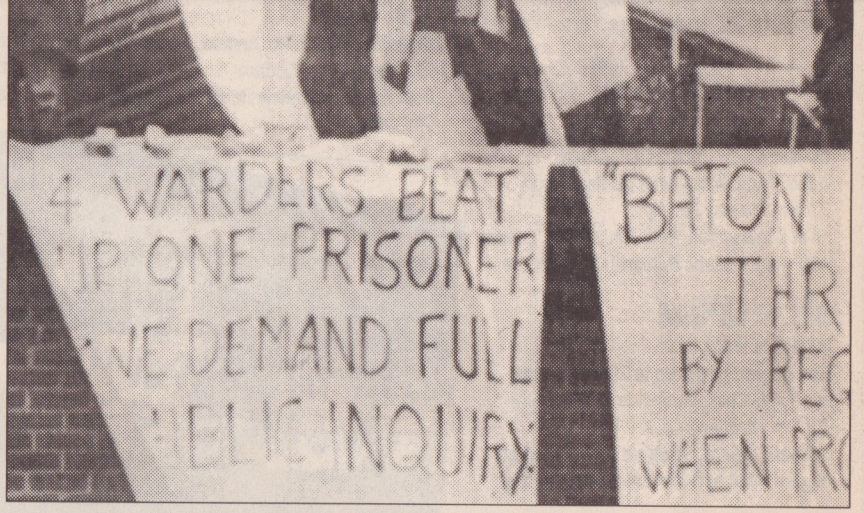
Under Michael Howard the prison system adopted a definite ideological orientation which drew its inspiration from some of the worst penal practices of the US, especially in relation to the treatment of long-term and high security prisoners. In choosing to adopt the US model, the British authorities have made a definitive decision to prioritise the demands of security and control to the virtual exclusion of everything else. This new macho approach towards long-term prisoners is creating a progressive build-up of stress and resentment which will inevitably seek release in almost

Scottish prisons had a notorious reputation for austere and punitive regimes, and disaffection was dealt with by straightforward violence and psychological brutality; the 'cages' of Inverness symbolised the response of the Scottish prison authorities to 'unmanageable' prisoners. Although the beginnings of a different way of dealing with 'difficult' prisoners were apparent in the creation of the Barlinnie Special Unit in the mid-1970s, the more universal experience of Scottish prisoners was one of unyielding regimes and a staff quick to respond to dissent with overwhelming force. In 1987 Scottish prisons became engulfed in some of the most violent rebellions in British penal history, characterised by hostage-taking and a willingness by prisoners to battle it out with riot squads and physically resist all attempts to subdue them. As the casualty toll for the uprisings increased it became apparent that it was only a matter of time before prison staff sustained fatalities. 1987 marked the point where the Scottish prison authorities began to realise that the cost of over-oppressive regimes was becoming unacceptably high and that a fundamental change in philosophy and practice was inevitable.

That ideological turning point has not yet been reached in English penal thinking and it will require many more Full Suttons – and unfortunately even an Attica – before some degree of common sense prevails and the Howard legacy is discredited and abandoned. Meanwhile those prisoners scapegoated and prosecuted for the two most recent uprisings at Full Sutton will be tried and sentenced to additional terms of imprisonment and the regime at the prison will be made even more intolerable and provocative.

John Bowden, HMP Nottingham

Thirteen prisoners have been committed for trial



Prisoners' Solicitors Firm

In the last issue of FRFI I raised the issue of Continuous Assessment. This resulted in various prisoners writing to me. One letter in particular, from Frank Birley, a prisoner languishing in segregation/isolation, fired me with renewed hope.

Prisoners are entitled by law to many fundamental rights but these fail to be adhered to as the people who administer institutions are calculatingly insidious when it comes to enforcing legal remedies in favour of those unfortunate enough to be contained under such inhuman and barbaric conditions. There are now a minority of prisoners communicating with one another in hope to rebuild and restore the solidarity needed on a mass national scale. This will hopefully begin to intensify. The aim will be to focus on productive strategies to ensure that prisoners being systematically abused are treated humanely and fairly. A number of prisoners are in consultation with one specific legal firm to seek a solution to the growing infringement of prisoners' rights: the logical solution being that a firm of solicitors becomes the Prisoners' Solicitors Firm (PSF), an independent body which would strictly adhere to prisoners' rights and constitute a bond between all concerned. This firm will focus on direct legal action against

is irrelevant. The relevant factor is that we are prepared to suffer for what we believe in: humanitarian conditions and the restoration of rights which have been brutally stripped from us over the previous five years in particular.

The PSF will need as much help as possible and prisoners will be urged to help fund it. This firm will aim to tackle such subjects as racism, harassment, visiting conditions, solitary confinement and continuous assessment, medical treatment, torture/brutality, categorisation, mandatory life sentence prisoners' parole reviews and, if necessary, to challenge knockbacks by Judicial Reviews and applications to the ECHR. It will be up to prisoners to urge other prisoners to write to the solicitors below informing them that they support the idea of the PSF. At this stage we are still considering the easiest way to deduct 30p from prisoners' weekly earnings to fund the PSF. (Take on board that this is the state's money.)

Personally, I have spent over a decade in prison as a hostage of the corrupt state, and have been the victim of and witness to some horrendous scenes carried out by prison warders. It is well overdue that this treatment is stopped and it can be stopped. We are all aware of the Home Office propaganda regarding

contact or injury, simply the constant destruction and repair of inanimate structures. It had become an intrinsic part of this well-scripted drama that as soon as the riot squads arrived, prisoners would abandon their protest and melt away in passive surrender. The prisoners considered there was little to gain and much to lose by being identified as aggressive ringleaders and inviting serious legal retribution and increased prison sentences. Disengaging at the point of direct physical confrontation ensured a greater chance of escaping prosecution. There was also the tactical disadvantage inherent in a struggle fought out in a confined space against well- trained riot squads able to call on an inexhaustible supply of manpower and equipment. This inevitably tipped the psychological balance of power firmly to the advantage of prison staff, who came to believe that no matter how prolonged the 'disturbance' and no matter how extensive the damage, control would always be restored with the minimum of physical injury.

In April 1998 prisoners on D Wing at Full Sutton decided to stage a peaceful protest and collectively refused to be locked in their cells, withdrawing to a television room as a gesture both of defiance and physical non-confrontation. Their intention was simply to highlight their grievance against the increasingly oppressive and provocative regime and the administration's complete non-recognition that men serving sentences measured in decades should be conceded some reasonable degree of say over the conditions of their captivity.

Instead of attempting to negotiate, the administration resorted to its usual show of force, but on this occasion the riot squads met with fierce resistance and a bloody battle ensued. By the time control of the wing was restored, injuries had been sustained on both sides and a line crossed which prison staff had believed was inviolable.

What happened at Full Sutton has ing inexorably more vicious and direct. The suspicion is that there exists an administrative intention to sustain the momentum of that conflict until a sufficiently 'serious disturbance' provides the necessary justification to lock down the gaol completely and impose a Control Unit regime on its inmates. The evidence from the regime changes elsewhere in the maximum security system tends to support this view.

Under Michael Howard the prison system adopted a definite ideological orientation which drew its inspiration from some of the worst penal practices of the US, especially in relation to the treatment of long-term and high security prisoners. In choosing to adopt the US model, the British authorities have made a definitive decision to prioritise the demands of security and control to the virtual exclusion of everything else. This new macho approach towards long-term prisoners is creating a progressive build-up of stress and resentment which will inevitably seek release in almost cathartic acts of collective defiance and rebellion. Prisoners can only be pushed so far before they begin to push back and no amount of anti-riot hardware and US-style lock-down regimes will stem the pent-up rage of prisoners long brutalised and made desperate when they decide that enough is enough. If the US model illustrates anything, it is that periodic losses of control assume murderous proportions and that dehumanised prisoners do not confine their riotous activities to merely destroying prison property. The spectre of Attica and Santa Fe should concentrate the minds of those who favour the Americanisation of the prison system in this country.

There are other examples of how bad things could become closer to home and much might be learned from the experience of the Scottish prison system, which during the 1980s was engulfed in some of the most violent uprisings in British penal history. Prior to the mid-1980s, tempts to subdue them. As the casualty toll for the uprisings increased it became apparent that it was only a matter of time before prison staff sustained fatalities. 1987 marked the point where the Scottish prison authorities began to realise that the cost of over-oppressive regimes was becoming unacceptably high and that a fundamental change in philosophy and practice was inevitable.

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Thirteen prisoners have been committed for trial in connection with the January 1997 Full Sutton uprising: four men who were on C wing will appear at Hull Crown Court from 3 August, while the nine who were on D wing are due to be tried from 26 October.

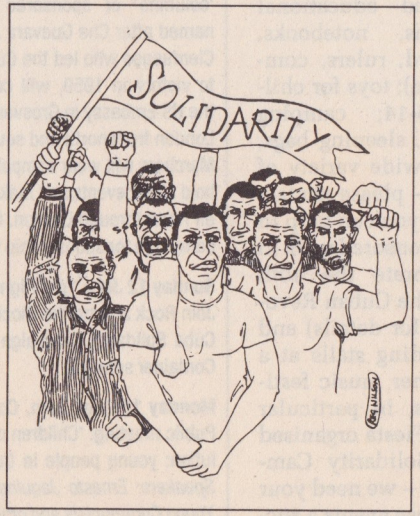

Illustration by Reg Wilson, HMP Wakefield

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I would like to make it clear that this will benefit all prisoners on a national level and will not focus primarily on long-term prisoners or prisoners in isolation/punishment blocks. The aim is to challenge the violation of prisoners' rights and rectify the rapid growth of prison personnel malpractices. We will focus on intensifying the bonds between prisoners so that the solidarity is restored within as many prisons as possible. This will enable us to reduce the growing rate of prison suicides, state murders and acts of self-mutilation and effectively ensure that prisoners' conditions improve. This is not going to be easy and some of us will suffer great hardship. This to a minority of prisoners

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Personally, I have spent over a decade in prison as a hostage of the corrupt state, and have been the victim of and witness to some horrendous scenes carried out by prison warders. It is well overdue that this treatment is stopped and it can be stopped. We are all aware of the Home Office propaganda regarding prisons and prisoners and the widespread disgust that the tabloid press claims comes from the public. However, we are also aware that they focus on low security prisons, giving the impression that all prisons are run identically, fearing to enter the depths of the prison system to expose the atrocities in action as they fear a public outcry. I say this to all of you reading this: it does not need to be this way. We have the ability to rise and expose the inhumanity being forced upon us. We have all lost our liberty: that is supposed to be the punishment – nothing less and nothing more. The time has come to unite as one and fight back against that force which has destroyed the lives of so many prisoners and their families; a force which so desperately tries to strip us of our identities and dignity. You could be the next victim.

Kenny Carter, HMP Belmarsh

Write to PSF, c/o Cox, Howard and Co, Tribune House, 17 Clifford Street, York YO1 1RG

BUILDING A NEW MOVEMENT

FRFI MEETINGS AND EVENTS

LONDON

Public meeting
Fight Poverty Pay! Smash the New Deal!
7:30pm Monday 6 July
Speakers: FRFI, Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign, Tameside careworkers

Readers' and supporters' groups
Irish Peace Deal – No Justice, No Peace
7:30pm Monday 22 June

The Legacy of the Black Panthers
Video: Panther followed by discussion
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Readers' and supporters' groups
Irish Peace Agreement: No Justice, No Peace
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Public meeting
Irish Peace Deal: No Justice, No Peace
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For further details of RCG meetings, contact us at BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX tel: 0171 837 1688 or fax 0171 837 1743

Fighting capitalist lies...

This issue reports on working class struggles brewing up all over the world. Near insurrection in Indonesia finally rid the country of the Suharto regime, coinciding with mounting struggles in South Korea and South Africa. A general strike in Denmark, the victory of the Australian dockers, all these point to a new turn of events. The entire capitalist system teeters on the edge of an abyss, because it cannot contain the mounting anger and resistance of the working class and oppressed. After a decade of reaction since the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, we can sense a new optimism.

The crisis is slowly turning things round in this country too. There is a deep, sullen hatred for New Labour amongst the working class, which sees them rightly as wealthy politicians with no interest in the conditions of the poor except to make them worse. But now even sections of the middle class are beginning to share some of the experience of workers – longer hours, harsher management regimes, casualised labour. New ideas to make progress are appearing; the success of the PolyGram picket is one indication.

A further example was the 60,000 demonstration at the G8 summit in Birmingham, reported on page 4. Supporters of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* set up stalls on Cuba and in support of the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign, and participated in events such as a march in support of the Palestinian people. Who was there? Many people new to politics, greens, anarchists, Christians, many open to anti-imperialist ideas. Who was absent? The trade unions, and therefore the bulk of the left, both unable and unwilling to make the connection between Third World debt, multinational rapaciousness and the struggle against poverty pay in Britain. Meanwhile, comrades sold 240 copies of FRFI, over £100 of other literature and raised more than £100 for the RNCC. As one supporter reported: 'The reception from Christians, aid group workers and greens to FRFI was far more positive than those of labour and trade union hacks and it was clear that overtures to green, unemployed and other social movements around anti-capitalism can bring success. Whilst there is a considerable leap in consciousness to be made from concern about cancelling Third World debt to a Marxist critique of imperialism, the events in Birmingham showed that we were frequently able to make that very con-

Supporters in the Midlands were able to contrast this openness with the sectarianism of the SWP at a meeting in Chesterfield on the May 1968 events in France. Alex Callinicos managed to talk about the 1960s and 1970s without once mentioning the war in Ireland, let alone the SWP's support for sending in British troops in 1969. When challenged about this and the SWP's support for Labour, he avoided any answer, but argued that the suffering of the Indonesian working class was comparable to that of the British working class. Our professor lives in a world of his own. Things soon degenerated with threats against FRFI supporters – but as usual it was all mouth and no trousers, just like SWP politics.

FRFI is committed to building a movement which is completely democratic and inclusive, because this is the only way in which working class interests can be defended and advanced. The sectarianism of the SWP and others on the left prevents this from happening. Their politics are the politics of exclusion – excluding the demonstrators in Birmingham, excluding those who are outside the official trade union movement, excluding those who really want to fight back.

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THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

A national demonstration outside the US embassy in London on 18 April and a dayschool the next day celebrated Cuba's defeat of the US-backed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and the survival of its socialist revolution in the face of continuing imperialist aggression. Despite police opposition, demonstrators laid flowers on the steps of the Embassy in memory of the Cuban revolutionaries killed in the invasion. The dayschool focused on Cuba's transition to socialism, the effects of the US blockade and, vitally, the need to build a socialist movement in this country capable of both defending Cuba and fighting in the interests of the working class in Britain. The events, supported by Cuba Vive! student groups and others from around the country, were an inspiring and timely reminder of the need to redouble our efforts in solidarity with socialist Cuba, and get actively involved with Rock around the Blockade.

In **Manchester**, the student society held a sponsored walk, retracing the steps of the Kinder Scout trespass of the 1930s and raised £200 for Rock around the Blockade's current project to provide a sound system for young people in Cuba. The walk was followed by a lively social. The society is now focusing its efforts on the Boycott Bacardi campaign, which aims to get Bacardi rum (the counter-revolutionary ex-Cuban Bacardi family strongly support the US blockade) banned from student union bars and replaced by the Cuban Havana Club. They have produced a logo, a leaflet and posters. Ideas in the pipeline include a 'Havana Club night'. Anyone interested in this campaign should contact Rock around the Blockade for further details. Comrades from Manchester and Blackburn will also be taking part in the 60-mile sponsored bike ride from Manchester to Blackpool on 11 July and holding a stall at the Unity Festival.

In the **Midlands**, Lincoln Cuba Solidarity Campaign, which works closely with Rock around the Blockade, held a film showing of *The Meningitis Miracle*. Fundraising activities continue: a sponsored event is planned, and a social event in Chesterfield in the autumn.

Rock around the Blockade in London meets regularly to plan events and discuss developments in Cuba. Recent discussions on articles in the Cuban newspaper *Granma International* have been on the *Communist Manifesto* and Fidel Castro's speech to the World Health Organisation. We have held stalls at a Squall salsa evening and the May Day festival and organised street meetings. Comrades spoke at a Cuba Vive! student meeting in **Bristol** and the picket of PolyGram organised by the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign in **Blackburn**, where the speaker stressed the importance of the example of socialist Cuba to our struggles for justice here in Britain.

Comrades in London are collecting material aid for a number of youth projects in the province of Sancti Spiritus in Cuba: we need educational materials (pens, notebooks, paper, cardboard, rulers, compasses and so on); toys for children aged 5-14; camping materials (tents, sleeping bags, torches) and a wide variety of other materials – please contact the campaign if you can help in any way. Our sponsored walk in July will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution (see box for details) and we will be holding stalls at a variety of summer music festivals and events, in particular the Cuba Lives Fiesta organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign on 12 July – we need your help to make these events a success.

EVENTS

LONDON

The campaign meets at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 on alternate Mondays at 8pm. Next meetings: **15 June, 29 June, 13 July, 20 July.** All welcome

11-13 July A weekend of activity in solidarity with Cuba.

SAT 11 JULY: SPONSORED EXTRAVAGANZA TO MARK 40th ANNIVERSARY OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION. Two 'columns' of sponsored marchers, named after Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos who led the Cuban forces to victory in 1959, will converge on the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square, London from north and south London. Marchers will wear campaign t-shirts, hold street events and make speeches en route through London. Contact the campaign for sponsorship forms.

Sunday 12 July: 1pm Highbury Fields Join Rock around the Blockade at the Cuba Solidarity Campaign fiesta and Container send-off.

Monday 13 July, 8pm, Conway Hall. Public meeting: 'Children of the revolution: young people in Cuba today'. *Speakers: Ernesto Jaquinet, Union of Young Communists and others.*

CELEBRATE THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLUTION IN CUBA ON 1 JANUARY 1999

amongst the youth of Trinidad de Cuba, to the beat of a sound system supplied by Rock around the Blockade!

Rock around the Blockade has already raised £2,000 towards the cost of disco equipment for the Cuban Union of Young Communists in the province of Sancti Spiritus. We still need £3,000. The young people of Trinidad, the capital of the province, have at the moment no youth centre of their own. The UJC of the region, with our help, aims to provide one in time to see in the new year, and so advance its revolutionary work uniting the young people of Cuba. Rock around the Blockade will be sending a brigade of 15 activists to Sancti Spiritus from 22 December 1998 to 4 January 1999 to meet the young communists of Sancti Spiritus and learn about their experience of life in socialist Cuba, while living and working on an agricultural camp and participating in political and cultural meetings and events. The overall cost, including airfares, airport tax, board and lodgings will be between £600-£650. Deposits must be in by 31 July. If you would like to take part in this unique and inspiring opportunity, get involved with the campaign now.

I would like more information about how I can get involved in Rock around the Blockade ☐

I would like to join Rock around the Blockade and enclose £10 (waged)/£4 (low waged)/£2 (unwaged) £ _____ (cheques/POs payable to Rock around the Blockade)

I would like more information about the 1998/1999 brigade to Cuba ☐
I enclose a donation towards the disco for Cuban youth £ _____

Return to Rock around the Blockade, c/o BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX or tel: 0171 837 1688

Wear your politics on your sleeve... with our popular campaign T-shirt, reissued to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution at the end of this year. Black and red on white, with a picture of Che Guevara and the words 'Viva Cuba' and '40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution' on the front and a quote from Che 'A true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' on the back.

...or your lapel with Rock around the Blockade's new campaign badge, 3cm diameter, red and black on white, 50p.

Please send me_____T-shirts (specify XL, L, M, S) at £7 each and _____badges at 50p each. I enclose a cheque for £_____ payable to Rock around the Blockade

Name _____

Address _____

_____

Return to Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

CHOOSE THE RCG

If you believe that the treachery of the opportunist British Labour and trade union movement must be challenged, then there is no alternative – **Join the RCG!**

I would like to join/receive more information about the RCG ☐

I would like to join an FRFI Readers & Supporters Group ☐

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____

_____

Tel _____

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Prison destroys family ties: two prisoners write

I would like to bring an issue to your notice which concerns many people shut in the prison system. It is about visits. Like myself, there are a great number of people in prison who can't get visits: either because they are in a gaol many miles from their homes or because their local gaols refuse to take them for accumulated visits once they've been moved after sentence.

Some, like myself, also have the added problems of illness within the family unit that makes travel to and from different prisons harder. My parents are both in their 60s. They also look after my four-year-old son. My father has just had a stroke and because I'm so far from my home, I'm unable to get visits.

It took me just over a year to get a gaol which would take me for accumulated visits because my local has refused to take me, so the closest I could get was still over 80 miles from my family, while the local is only seven miles away. Even then, after only two weeks, my visits got cancelled. I was given no reason. On the morning of the day I was ghosted back to Full Sutton I had been told that my application for an extra seven days had been granted. So instead of 28 days I would get 35. Then at 1.20pm I'm told to get ready for a pre-booked visit; at 1.45pm six screws turn up at my cell and the PO tells me my visits have been cancelled and I'm being sent back.

Since 12 February 1998 I've been trying to find out why my visits got cancelled. So far I've had five different reasons and not one of them gave an explanation and each one used the excuse of security. I'm a Cat B prisoner and I'm stuck in a maximum security prison over 200 miles from my family and my young son. What has happened to the prison guidelines for keeping prisoners in touch and as close as possible to family and friends and the community? How many families are broken up because they are unable to get visits with their loved ones in gaol? Why does this Home Secretary, like the last one, still allow this practice to carry on? It is vicious to make not only the person in prison suffer but also to make their families suffer.

The prison population has reached 65,000. How many of these 65,000 people won't be able to get visits? How many of their families will break under the strain of being forced apart, unable to travel great distances? How many of the 65,000 are in fact innocent of the crimes they are in prison for? How many of these innocent people will also suffer because of the prison system and its uncaring manner towards prisoners and their families?

Everyone in gaol is entitled to at least two visits a month if convicted. So why this barbaric treatment which causes family breakdowns, suicides and other such reactions because people are unable to get to see their families and other loved ones? When is the Home Secretary going to do something to help instead of hinder, not only creating unrest within the prison system but also wrecking families who have committed no crime, yet are made to suffer as well?

It is about time prisons became less choosy as to which prisoners they will and won't accept because this stops people from having visits if the receiving prison believes the prisoner is going to be a problem or could be a problem. Even 28 days down the seg has to be better than no visits.

ADAM ENGLAND (NL3800)
HMP Full Sutton, York YO4 1PS

Prison regimes are ultimately a danger to the public. The majority of people who experience prison in this country will be psychologically damaged by the ignorant and abusive regime, which actively seeks to destroy a prisoner's family ties and marriage. It is practically impossible to maintain any form of relationship within the oppressive visiting conditions. Prisoners only have a statutory 30-minute visit every two weeks. Prison authorities who allow slightly longer visits trumpet this and use it as propaganda that they help prisoners maintain family links. Yet they fully know that the visits are oppressive and degrading for prisoners and visitors.

A prison governor stated to me that 'there was no job security for prison staff in rehabilitation'. When I said that prison regimes destroy family ties, he said 'It's your own fault for being in prison', implying that the prison service couldn't care less what happens to prisoners and their families.

I am witnessing young men entering prison who have never used hard drugs before quietly succumbing to heroin abuse. They use heroin to cope with an oppressive regime, the destruction of their family ties and spending long periods locked in cells with little to occupy that time.

Suicides are increasing, not solely because numbers are increasing but because regimes are becoming more oppressive. Turnkeys have total control on the landings. These turnkeys have no educational qualifications or intelligence. They control regimes through intimidation and allowing prisoners to use heroin. As Mr Ramsbotham stated, we all know who uses drugs in prison. Which proves my point.

Prisoners are abused, degraded, taught ignorance over consideration. Their lives and family ties are destroyed. Then they are released into society, dehumanised – with the compliments of the prison service. It's a public scandal and the public should be made aware of the danger they are in from the present regimes.

STEVEN BATTRAM (NK2513)
E Wing, HMP Full Sutton

Release Josephine Hayden!

Josephine Hayden is an Irish Republican opposed to the occupation of the north of Ireland by British troops, and to the imposition of another Unionist 'agreement' on the Irish people. Because of this stance, and the belief that only a 32-County united Ireland offers any real prospect of peace and political stability, she continues to be imprisoned by the Irish state in Limerick gaol despite her serious heart condition.

By any internationally recognised standards of humanity, political decency and clemency, she should be released to be able to receive adequate medical treatment and be cared for by her family. What threat can someone as ill as Josephine possibly pose the Irish or British states? Why keep her in prison? The inhuman vengeance of the state can be the only answer.

While this seriously ill woman continues to be held in the most appalling conditions with no prospect of early release, other POWs who are prepared to support the agreement are being released, one even being allowed out of Portlaoise for the Sinn Fein conference. We are for the unconditional release of all Republican prisoners regardless of their political affiliations.

THE WORKERS REPUBLICAN FORUM
PO Box 5042, Northampton NN3 8ZG

Cuba resists blockade

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CASUALISATION KILLS

On Friday 24 April, Justice? activist Simon Jones was tragically killed

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I am glad to see Cuba pulling out of the Special Period by its own resources, *without* the United States. One by one, Cuban industries return to pre-1989 levels, and better even than 1989, without either the USSR or the USA. How the US ruling class gets nervous, seeing that once more their 'ripe fruit' eludes the US annexationist basket, as it has done for over 200 years. And some in the US begin to attach 'conditions' for normalising relations with Cuba.

Frankly, I'd prefer the US never normalising relations with Cuba, seeing as I do that Cuba begins to normalise its economy without the US. We don't need the US and its arrogance. The worst part of the blockade, which many outside Cuba do not realise, is the active persecution and coercive strong-arm tactics against businesses who trade with Cuba, many who had been trading with Cuba since last century – case in point, Tabacatera, a Spanish tobacconist firm – to cease trading or face sanctions and blackmail from the US.

While normalisation of US-Cuba relations would provide an 'easy way out' and a real tourist boom, since given the educational level of the Cuban people there is absolutely nothing US industry produces that we couldn't produce ourselves. I'd prefer the more difficult but more independent method of continuing to develop our own industry to the fullest, rather than return to economic dependence on the US.

European or Asian capital to us is different, because, unlike the US, those nations have no urge to annex us and no capability to annex us, while the imperialist US will continue posing a great danger to Cuba for as long as imperialism manages to postpone its inevitable final demise.

ANA LUCIA GELABERT
384484, Riverside, 1401 Stateschool Rd, Gatesville, TX 76528, USA
On 11 April Ana Lucia was viciously attacked by another inmate, apparently at the behest of the unit administration. She may suffer permanent damage to her right eye as a result. Readers are encouraged to write to her.

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Responsible for HIV in Zimbabwe

The witch-hunt of Mary Bell

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Responsible for HIV in Zimbabwe

David Kitson's article, 'Crisis in Zimbabwe' (FRFI April/May 1998) tells it like it is. I was particularly struck by the sentence 'About 40% of the female population has fallen victim to HIV.' 40% of Zimbabwe's female population condemned to a slow death! How did they get HIV?

HIV is a disease of the blood. It is transmitted sexually via body fluids but it has to get into the bloodstream to do damage. Who bleeds, gets. This means that women are far more liable to contract HIV than men. I suppose that even FRFI would find it rather indelicate to spell out just why.

Short of blaming the victims, the first responsibility must lie with Western male sex tourists, both gay and straight, eager to exploit a country where people will do practically anything for a trivial sum of money. Secondary responsibility lies with Zimbabwe's men who have transmitted the disease, acquired from Western male sex tourists, to the women through macho sex.

The routine sexual oppression of women is common, or should I say general, all over the world. In Zimbabwe, it is a killer.

IVOR KENNA
London

AIDS in African countries, as in all Third World countries, is indeed devastating. The newest and most effective drug treatments are not available, because they are too expensive. But it is wrong to blame men, whether they are Western 'sex tourists' or not. The real blame lies with the imperialist system which impoverishes the mass of people, forces workers to become migrant labourers, and the unemployed into prostitution. Education and health care are minimal and as a result men, women and children die in barbaric circumstances. They do not require anyone to point the finger of guilt.

The witch-hunt of Mary Bell

The Mary Bell affair showed how low Labour will stoop to maintain the alliance that brought it to office. The news that Bell would receive money for interviews she gave to Gitta Sereny sent the tabloids into a frenzy of hypocritical hysteria with Tony Blair and Jack Straw emerging as cheerleaders of the lynch mob. Blair, for example, wrote in the *Mail on Sunday* that 'most people would find it repugnant that anyone should benefit from crimes as heinous and repugnant as those.' Some benefit – the payment, initially estimated at £50,000, in fact turned out to be no more than £15,000: small beer compared to the £60-£100,000 the Express and Mirror are paying the two released nurses convicted of murder in Saudi Arabia. Mary Bell, remember, was convicted of manslaughter.

Jack Straw, who earns six time what Mary Bell was paid *every year*, wrote in *The Sun*: 'It's certainly the case that Mary Bell, by bringing herself into the public arena in such a dramatic way, has compromised her own claim for privacy.' Taking their cue, *The Sun* led the chase to hunt Mary Bell down and hound her from her home, in the process revealing to her daughter – in whose interests the court injunctions protecting the family's privacy had been granted – who her mother really was. So much for Straw and the rule of law or his notions of 'responsibility'. What price the rights of a working class former juvenile criminal as against those of Rupert Murdoch and his news empire?

TOM GEORGE
London

FIGHT RACISM

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

FIGHT POVERTY PAY!

Dancing in defiance – campaign targets PolyGram

Nigel Cook denied victimisation pay for organising union! Ask Bill Morris why

'Claims for victimisation benefit shall only be allowed if…the member claiming has been victimised as a result of their trade union activities' (TGWU rule book)

In March 1997, a meeting of the Transport and General Workers Union 6/62 branch agreed that Nigel Cook should organise a union at M&S packaging. Following an incident there when Nigel was threatened by the manager for distributing union leaflets, T&G district secretary Jim Bowie wrote to M&S: 'I am very concerned that you threatened Mr Cook…you actually suspended him on full pay for handing out our leaflets, in his own time, in a public place. You then followed his car in an intimidating manner in front of witnesses. Our intention is to continue recruiting employees into our organisation, secure a majority and approach you for recognition.'

Nigel was sacked in May 1997. The union immediately lodged an application to an industrial tribunal on the grounds that he had clearly been sacked for trade union activities. When the application was disal-

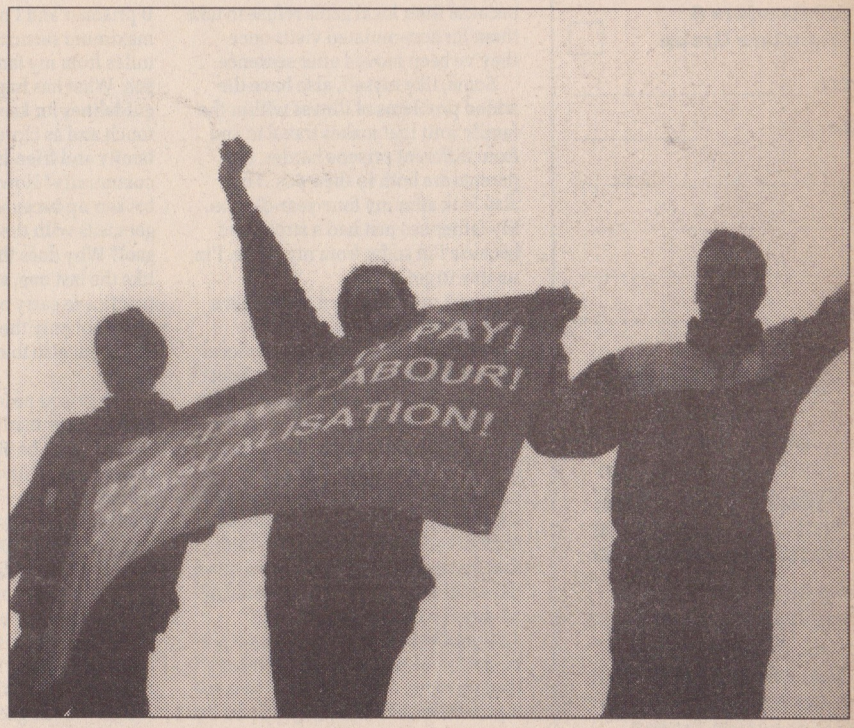
On 23 May, supporters of the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign danced on the roof of PolyGram's largest CD manufacturing plant in Blackburn during a demonstration to mark the first anniversary of Nigel Cook's sacking.

Over 100 people from all over the country joined a peaceful protest outside PolyGram with banners, placards, whistles and drums. The slogans were loud and clear: 'End casualisation! No to slave labour! Reinstate Nigel Cook!' Demonstrators listened to inspiring speeches from Micky Tighe of the Liverpool Dockers and Sylvia Tighe of Women of the Waterfront, Tameside Unemployed Workers Alliance, the Revolutionary Communist Group and Rock around the Blockade; the event was supported by independent band Tulip Lounge and by representatives of SchNEWS, Corporate Watch, Bury Unemployed Centre and Unison Mental Health Salford branch. The demonstrators then set off up the road to take the protest to MS Packaging, flanked by a handful of police officers.

Suddenly two demonstrators appeared on the roof of the building at the entrance to the guarded road that led to the sacred PolyGram building. A banner was thrown up to them, roars of delight went up. Six of us then crossed the police lines and ran down the road towards the PolyGram building, climbed some convenient scaffolding and attached huge banners – 'Fight poverty pay!' and 'PolyGram, Cook.' As we did this we saw the hidden arm of the state come into action as mounted police emerged and dog-handlers, with dogs straining at the leash. So keen were they that one bit a PolyGram boss as he tried to enter the building! We made our exit out the back over the flat rooves. A lone police handler and his dog caught up with us at the perimeter fence and ordered the three of us left inside onto our knees – or he'd set his dog on us. He handcuffed us and threatened again to set the dog on us if anyone tried to run.

Eventually, due to uncompromising demands by our stewards, we walked triumphantly back down the road, past PolyGram adorned with our banners and the mounted police, to the rapturous welcome of demonstrators chanting for the immediate release of Nigel Cook, who'd been wrestled to the ground by two coppers as we broke through police lines. He was later released without charge.

The fact that PolyGram had such an excessive police presence on the day is alarming. Mounted police, dogs, surveillance cameras and teams of workers organised beforehand to remove RNCC publicity demonstrates that PolyGram will use any method they can to safeguard the appalling conditions used to amass their obscene profits, with the wholehearted support of the British state. Those who are prepared to fight back will have to organise effectively to resist.



Enough of this show!

The following is an edited version of the speech given by RCG speaker Trevor Rayne at the PolyGram picket in May.

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Nigel was sacked in May 1997. The union immediately lodged an application to an industrial tribunal on the grounds that he had clearly been sacked for trade union activities. When the application was disallowed on a legal technicality, the union challenged this. On 17 June 1997 the regional organiser, Brian Dawson, wrote to Fergus Whitty, the union director of legal services: 'Given the principle involved, that is dismissal for trade union activities, we would ask that you grant authority, as a matter of urgency, in order that we can proceed with the application to an industrial tribunal.' Whitty duly granted authority.

The union's regional secretary Dave McCall, regional legal specialist Lynne Gibon and its Region 6 Committee are all on record accepting that Nigel was sacked for his union activities.

Yet Bill Morris recently wrote to

campaign targets PolyGram

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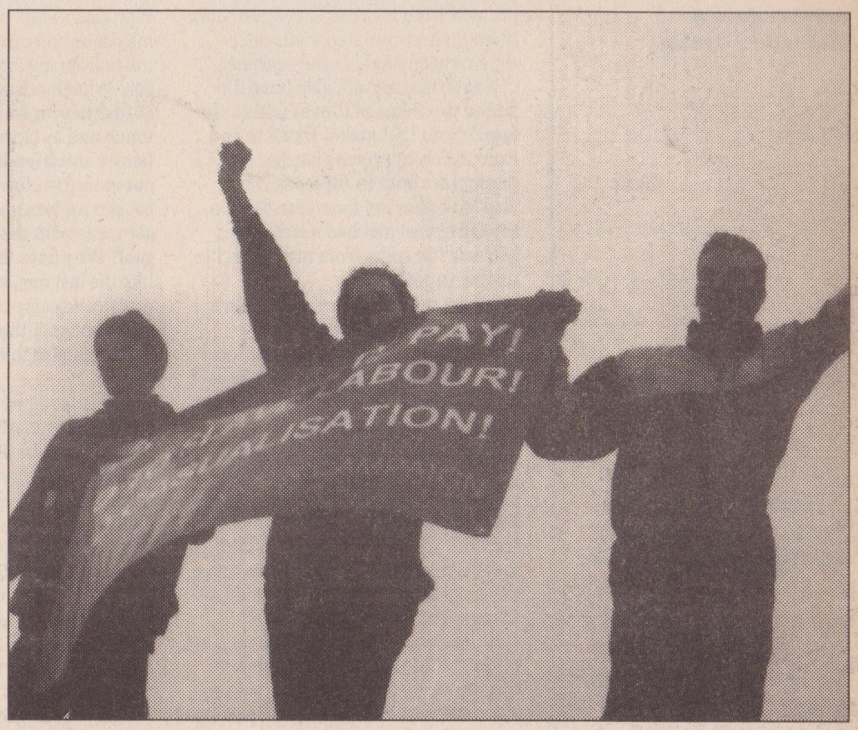
Hannah Caller and Nigel Cook



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'I get £89,000 a year…I'm worth it, you're not' – not our words, but those of Home Secretary Jack Straw, MP for Blackburn, addressing Nigel Cook and his supporters on the streets of Blackburn. In the game of winners and losers that is Blair's Britain, this is the contempt with which the winners view the losers.

We do not seek the respect of people like Straw, the corrupted handservants of wealth and arrogant power, of unaccountable elites. But why do they hold us – the poor, the unemployed, the dispossessed – in contempt? Because we do not have a voice and are not organised. Although we are many, fragmented we are hopeless, vulnerable to the system of refined and calculated cruelty that is the world of the Jobcentre, the DSS and chaos. It is said that coming events cast their shadow before them: look to Asia where the paper tigers are engulfed in flames. This is what awaits capitalism in all its arrogance and conceit.

Behind the glittering facade of PolyGram, the world's biggest record company, and the Brit Awards are industrial estates like these and workers struggling to get by on low wages. Behind U2 and Sheryl Crow, Sting and Sir Elton John, behind the Island label and Motown, behind *Thunderbirds*, *The Prisoner*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Mr Bean* and *Trainspotting*, all owned by PolyGram, are factories like these where workers work 12-hour shifts for £3 an hour and have to ask permission to go to the toilet and breaks are given at the manager's discretion. This is what has built the PolyGram fortunes. For Nigel Cook, a communist and human being, it was his duty to form a trade union under

application to an industrial tribunal on the grounds that he had clearly been sacked for trade union activities. When the application was disallowed on a legal technicality, the union challenged this. On 17 June 1997 the regional organiser, Brian Dawson, wrote to Fergus Whitty, the union director of legal services: 'Given the principle involved, that is dismissal for trade union activities, we would ask that you grant authority, as a matter of urgency, in order that we can proceed with the application to an industrial tribunal.' Whitty duly granted authority.

The union's regional secretary Dave McCall, regional legal specialist Lynne Gibon and its Region 6 Committee are all on record accepting that Nigel was sacked for his union activities.

Yet Bill Morris recently wrote to Nigel saying he will not receive victimisation benefit and refused to give any reason why. He has also refused to inform Nigel how he can appeal against this decision.

When activists are not supported by the union their recruitment attempts are critically undermined. Sweatshop bosses are given the green light to continue abusing workers. To support Nigel Cook is to support all workers fighting back against appalling conditions and slave labour wages. Contact Bill Morris, General Secretary, TGWU, Transport House, Palace Street, London SW1E 5JD Tel 0171 828 7788 Fax 0171 630 5861 and tell him to support Nigel Cook and pay his victimisation benefit now! ■

To join the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign, contact PO Box 14, Accrington, Lancs BB5 1GG, tel: 01254 679605. Affiliation rates: £15 TUs, £5 waged, £1 unwaged. Get copies of the campaign's *Fight poverty pay!* bulletin, invite speakers to your organisation, send donations. The campaign also wants details about other companies profiting from poverty pay or about harassment of claimants.

lines and ran down the road towards the PolyGram building, climbed some convenient scaffolding and attached huge banners – 'Fight poverty pay!' and 'PolyGram, take a look – we're supporting Nigel

support of the British state. Those who are prepared to fight back will have to organise effectively to resist.

Hannah Caller and Nigel Cook

'Let them eat cake'
Jack Straw's contempt

Jack Straw, MP for Blackburn and, alongside Margaret Thatcher, a vice-president of Blackburn Rovers, recently went walkabout in Blackburn town centre with a handful of his cronies from the local Labour Party. As a crowd of over 100 gathered, Straw boasted how proud he was that his government represents 'the business community'.

RNCC supporters asked him what, in contrast, he intended to do about poverty pay. He said something vague about the minimum wage but couldn't – or wouldn't – answer when pressed about what Labour was going to do about the increasing use of casual labour.

When I asked him how much he earned, he tried to avoid the question but was eventually forced to blurt out: 'I get £89,000...I'm worth it, you're not.' But he'd totally misread the crowd, who started shouting 'Shameful!' 'Disgusting!' and loudly booed! Shortly after, with a look of relief, Straw and his entourage packed up their stall and fled.

'I get £89,000 ... I'm worth it, you're not.'

Recent jobs advertised in Blackburn Jobcentre include a care assistant at £2.65 an hour (nights) and a security guard working 2 x 12-hour days followed by 3 x 12-hour nights for £2.47 an hour. Failure to apply for such jobs when asked would result in your benefit being stopped. But that's all the unemployed are worth, isn't it, Jack?

Straw was seen later that afternoon in the directors' box at Ewood Park with those he really represents – the local business community.

Nigel Cook

The following is an edited version of the speech given by RCG speaker Trevor Rayne at the PolyGram picket in May.

'I get £89,000 a year ... I'm worth it, you're not' – not our words, but those of Home Secretary Jack Straw, MP for Blackburn, addressing Nigel Cook and his supporters on the streets of Blackburn. In the game of winners and losers that is Blair's Britain, this is the contempt with which the winners view the losers.

We do not seek the respect of people like Straw, the corrupted handservants of wealth and arrogant power, of unaccountable elites. But why do they hold us – the poor, the unemployed, the dispossessed – in contempt? Because we do not have a voice and are not organised. Although we are many, fragmented we are hopeless, vulnerable to the system of refined and calculated cruelty that is the world of the Jobcentre, the DSS and Labour's New Deal – a system of barely disguised forced labour. A world where the slightest resistance, such as shown by Nigel Cook, is relentlessly pursued by the army of hirelings and rule pushers.

We are here to say we are not playing any more. We are here for those without a voice, for those shunned by the Labour Party, those on whom the trade union leaders would rather turn their backs in a gesture of solidarity with the wealthy, the owners. We are here for those disregarded by the media, for the five million workers in Britain now earning less than £4 an hour, the one million women paid less than £2.25 an hour, the close on half the workforce on fixed-term, temporary and part-time contracts, while the profits of the job agencies soar.

We are here for the victims of what the Institute of Personnel and Development describes as an epidemic of long working hours, damaging families and health; for the millions forced to do unpaid overtime which is the norm in Britain today; for those who live in dread as bullying and fear spread through the workplace.

This is the triumph of capitalism, brutal and predatory, probing every corner of our lives in a desperate search for profits. This is the untold truth of the end of the 20th century: triumphal capitalism is in chaos. It is said that coming events cast their shadow before them: look to Asia where the paper tigers are engulfed in flames. This is what awaits capitalism in all its arrogance and conceit.

Behind the glittering facade of PolyGram, the world's biggest record company, and the Brit Awards are industrial estates like these and workers struggling to get by on low wages. Behind U2 and Sheryl Crow, Sting and Sir Elton John, behind the Island label and Motown, behind *Thunderbirds*, *The Prisoner*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Mr Bean* and *Trainspotting*, all owned by PolyGram, are factories like these where workers work 12-hour shifts for £3 an hour and have to ask permission to go to the toilet and breaks are given at the manager's discretion. This is what has built the PolyGram fortunes. For Nigel Cook, a communist and human being, it was his duty to form a trade union under these conditions.

Why is it that the enjoyment of music turns into the drudgery of low-paid wage slavery? Why do cinema dreams become the harsh reality of security cameras and squadrons of police? Why does the fantasy world of PolyGram end in the Kafkaesque nightmare that is visited upon Nigel Cook and others when they sign on? Why, when the world produces more wealth than ever before, are there more people than ever in poverty? Because the world is fast being turned into the private property of a handful of multinational corporations who buy and sell us like common merchandise.

This week Philips sold PolyGram for $10.6bn to the US multinational Seagram – that is about $75,000 for every man, woman and child in Blackburn. Fantastic concentrations of wealth tower over us, dictating our lives. The representatives of these multinationals sit in the Labour cabinet. They may all wear suits but so did Al Capone – and a smile. Gangsters sit in the counting houses, own and direct the banks. Hoodlums patrol the corridors of power. And conmen draft the laws. Enough of this show. We cannot and we will not pay the price. We are not the losers. Let's fight back and win. ■

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